

CISSR – Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori sulle Religioni
Italian Centre for Advanced Studies on Religions

Incontro annuale sulle origini cristiane
Annual Meeting on Christian Origins

Centro Residenziale Universitario di Bertinoro
1 – 3 Ottobre, 2026
University Residential Centre of Bertinoro
October 1 – 3, 2026



Il Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori sulle Religioni (CISSR), fondato nel 1999, promuove la ricerca scientifica sulle religioni, soprattutto nell'ambito della storia del cristianesimo e del giudaismo. Il Centro favorisce lo sviluppo degli studi sulle religioni nella formazione universitaria, organizzando convegni scientifici, offrendo supporto per la formazione post-universitaria e promuovendo iniziative culturali sulle religioni.

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Incontro annuale 2026 | 2026 Annual Meeting

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Organizzazione scientifica | Scientific Organization: M. Rescio, E.R. Urciuoli

Cura editoriale del programma | Program Book Editing: M. Rescio, E.R. Urciuoli, L. Walt

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c/o Centro Residenziale Universitario di Bertinoro
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<http://cissr.net>

CISSR Annual Meeting on Christian Origins

Bertinoro, October 1 – 3, 2026

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1

09:00 – 09:15 | Joint Session (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

OPENING OF THE MEETING

Presiding: Mara Rescio, Emiliano R. Urciuoli

09:15 – 11:15 | Joint Session AM 1 (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

CONTEXTS OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Presiding: John S. Kloppenborg

MARIANNE BJELLAND KARTZOW (University of Oslo, Norway)

Neighborhoods of Marginals, Non-Humans, and More-Than-Humans: New Testament Entanglements and Intersections

TONY KEDDIE (University of Texas, Austin, USA)

“The Way” as a Neighborhood Association in Acts of the Apostles and Roman Ephesos

HARRY O. MAIER (Vancouver School of Theology, Canada)

Christ Religion as Neighborhood Cultural Invention

EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI (University of Bologna, Italy)

You Shall Ignore Your Neighbor: Christ Religion and the Challenge of Everyday Social Exchange

Break 11:15 – 11:45

11:45 – 13:15 | Parallel Session AM 2.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

BOOK DISCUSSION (1)

Presiding: Luca Arcari

C. Johnson Hodge, *The God of This House: Christian Domestic Cult before Constantine*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2025

Discussants: Maria Dell’Isola (Max Weber College, University of Erfurt, Germany), Nicola Denzey Lewis (Claremont Graduate University, California, USA)

Respondent: Caroline Johnson Hodge (College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA)
General Discussion

11:45 – 13:15 | Parallel Session AM 2.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

GOSPEL OF THOMAS, NAG HAMMADI, AND GNOSTICISM

Presiding: Andrea Annese, Francesco Berno

WILLIAM ARNAL (University of Regina, Canada)

Beyond Diversity: Nag Hammadi as Lens for Reconceiving Christian Origins

EDUARD IRICINSCHI (University of Erfurt, Germany)

Reading the Gospel of Thomas with the Manichaeans

MARIA LUCIA ABAURRE GNERRE (Federal University of Paraíba, Brazil)

The Concept of “Indian Gnosticism” in the Works of Raniero Gnoli

Lunch Break 13:15 – 15:15 (CEUB)

15:15 – 17:15 | Parallel Session PM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

RABBINIC JUDAISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY (1)

Gender, Ritual Authority, and Boundary-Making

Presiding: Matthias Morgenstern

GAL SELA (University of Regensburg, Germany)

The Talmudic Jesus and the Origins of Christianity: Gender, Law, and Magic

JESSE MIROTNIK (University of Vienna, Austria)

Whence Paganism? A Shared Jewish-Christian Etiology

LÁSZLÓ ODOBINA (University of Szeged; University of Public Service – Budapest; Saint Athanasius Greek Catholic Theological College – Nyíregyháza, Hungary)

Competing Constructions of Sacred Time: Calendrical Authority and Jewish-Christian Boundary-Making in Late Antiquity

DORU DOROFTEI (Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany)

Between Halakhah and Sacrament: Competing Constructions of Holiness in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity

15:15 – 17:15 | Parallel Session PM 1.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

PAPYROLOGY AND EARLY CHRIST GROUPS

Presiding: Marco Stroppa

MARCO STROPPA (Papyrological Institute G. Vitelli, University of Florence, Italy)

An Anonymous Patristic Passage with a Quotation from Psalm 55(54) and the Iliad in an Unedited PSI Papyrus

PETER ARZT-GRABNER (University of Salzburg, Austria)

Covenants and Wills in Paul's Letters and in Documentary Papyri: Some Remarks on διαθήκη

Book Discussion

C. Mayer & P. Arzt-Grabner (eds), *Galatians* (PKNT – vol. 5), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2026

Discussants: Dorota M. Hartman (University of Naples L'Orientale, Italy), Fabrizio Marcello (Catholic University of Paris)

Respondent: Peter Arzt-Grabner (University of Salzburg, Austria)

General Discussion

Break 17:15 – 17:45

17:45 – 19:15 | Parallel Session PM 2.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

RE-DATING EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS

Thematic Book Discussion

Presiding: Claudio Gianotto

Book (1): M. Vinzent, *Die älteste Sammlung paulinischer Briefe und die Entstehung der kanonischen Paulusbriefsammlung, Teile I-III* (in collab. with M. Bilby, J. Bull, K. Lance Lotharp), Narr Francke, 2025

Book (2): M. Vinzent, *Von Paulus zu Saulus. Zwei Paulusbriefsammlungen im 2. Jahrhundert*, Herder, 2025

Discussants: Harry O. Maier (Vancouver School of Theology, Canada), Jan Heilmann (Dresden University of Technology, Germany)

Respondent: Markus Vinzent (Max Weber College, University of Erfurt, Germany)

General Discussion

17:45 – 19:15 | Parallel Session PM 2.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

RABBINIC JUDAISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY (2)

Oral & Written Sources

Presiding: Gal Sela

PAUL RODRIGUE (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)

Jerome and the Jewish Sage: Rejection and Adoption of Rabbinic Material in the Church Father's Writings

MICHAEL MODINI (Independent Researcher, Australia)

The Markan Alphabet Theory

GIUSEPPE VELTRI (University of Hamburg, Germany)

An Apology for Xanthippe: Women/Wives and Their Counterparts in the Hellenistic and Rabbinic World

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2

09:00 – 11:00 | Parallel Session AM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

GENDER ISSUES IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Presiding: Maria Dell'Isola, Mario Resta

TAYLOR PETREY (Kalamazoo College, Michigan, USA)

Castration Curiosity in the Second Century

ALIYAH EL MANSY (University of Münster, Germany)

Early Christian Attitudes Towards Female Work and Labor

KLAZINA STAAT (Free University Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Felicity's Servile Agency: Who Wrote the Passion of Perpetua and Felicity?

MARTA MICILLO (University of Naples Federico II, Italy)

Women on the Threshold: Sacred Space and Gendered Ecclesiastical Order in the Synod of Laodicea

09:00 – 11:00 | Parallel Session AM 1.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

JEWISH HISTORY, HELLENISTIC JUDAISM, AND SEPTUAGINT STUDIES

Presiding: Anna Mambelli, Marco Vitelli

SARIT COFMAN-SIMHON (Emunah College of Fine Arts and Design, Jerusalem, Israel)

The First Mystery Play: Jewish Hellenistic Exagoge

CAMILLA RECALCATI (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)

Magic and Incantation in Symmachus' Psalter: Notes from Ps 57(58):6b

EBERHARD BONS (University of Strasbourg, France) with **ANNA MAMBELLI** (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy) & **DANIELA SCIALABBA** (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, Italy)

Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint, Volume 2 – Major Results

ANTONELLA BELLANTUONO (UCLouvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium)

Religious Coexistence and the Construction of Identity: Judaism in Hellenistic Egypt between Isis, Serapis, and the Septuagint

Break 11:00 – 11:30

11:30 – 13:00 | Joint Session AM 2 (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

BOOK DISCUSSION (2)

Presiding: Luca Arcari

A. Destro & M. Pesce, *Gli Atti degli apostoli*, Marsilio, 2026

Discussants: Luca Arcari (University of Naples Federico II), Marida Nicolaci (Theological Faculty of Sicily – San Giovanni Evangelista, Palermo, Italy), Daniele Tripaldi (University of Bologna)

Respondents: Adriana Destro & Mauro Pesce (University of Bologna)

General Discussion

Lunch Break 13:00 – 15:00 (CEUB)

15:00 – 17:00 | Parallel Session PM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

ISSUES OF METHOD: NEW 'SECULAR' APPROACHES TO EARLY CHRISTIAN RESEARCH

Presiding: Emiliano R. Urciuoli

LAURA FELDT (University of Bergen, Norway / RADHEART)

Radical Habits of the Heart and Asceticism – Testing the Theoretical Framework of RADHEART on Historia monachorum in Aegypto

SILVIA GÓMEZ JIMÉNEZ (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain / RADHEART)

Senses, Sacred Architecture and Religious Commitment in Late Antique Poetry

ROBERTO ALCIATI (University of Florence, Italy)

How Radical was Late Antique Religion? Testing Total Devotion in the Writings of Clement of Alexandria

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN (Aarhus University, Denmark)

A Plea for Theoretical and Methodological Consilience in the Study of Formative Christ Religion

15:00 – 17:00 | Parallel Session PM 1.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

FROM THE HISTORY OF EXEGESIS TO RECEPTION HISTORY AND BEYOND

Presiding: Laura Carnevale

CLARK R. BATES (Forge Theological Seminary, Summerville, South Carolina, USA)

Χωρίς or Χάρις? How a Textual Variant in Heb 2:9 Became an Orthodox Shibboleth in the Late-Antique Church

J. ANDREW DOOLE (University of Innsbruck, Austria)

Barabbas in Modern Fiction

DANIELE PASSEGGI (University of Naples Federico II, Italy)

"This Golgotha of the Contemporary World": John Paul II and the Pilgrimage to Auschwitz-Birkenau (2–10 June 1979)

JEFF TRIPP (Rock Valley College, Rockford, Illinois, USA // online)

The Reception of Jesus's Death as a Suicide

Break 17:00 – 17:30

17:30 – 18:45 | Keynote Lecture (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

Presiding: Mara Rescio, Luigi Walt

LAURA NASRALLAH (Yale University, New Haven, USA)

Making Canon, Practicing Allegory: Case Studies in Stone, Bone, and Papyrus

General Discussion

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

09:00 – 11:00 | Parallel Session AM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES AROUND JESUS IN THE EARLY MODERN AND MODERN PERIOD

Presiding: Miriam Benfatto, Cristiana Facchini

ANDRÁS KISS (University of Jewish Studies, Budapest, Hungary)

Reclaiming Jesus, Judaizing Christ: Modern Jewish Appropriations of Jesus and the Polemics of Identity

DARIUSZ PNIEWSKI (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland)

The Rhetorical Figure of Jesus and the Industrial Revolution

NORBERT NAGY (University of Oxford, UK)

Constructing the Historical Jesus on the Religious Margins: Radical Scholarship and Modern Biblical Culture

JILL HICKS-KEETON (University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA)

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's The Woman's Bible and Contests over Canon in the Modern U.S.

09:00 – 11:00 | Parallel Session AM 1.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS AND ROMAN LAW

Presiding: Martina Carandino, Paolo Costa

GIACOMO AIAZZI (Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy)

Jesus' Illegal Imagination and the parable of the unjust steward (Lk 16:1-9)

GIOVANNI RIBUOLI (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Rome, Italy)

Land, Talents and the Pearl: Whose Were They? And Why Should One Buy the Field?

ANDREA DI LENARDO (Ca' Foscari University of Venice / University of Udine / University of Trieste, Italy)

Paul's Politics and the Experience of Roman Legal Authority

SILVIA VIARO (University of Padua, Italy)

Pliny's Doubts, Trajan's Rescript, and Tertullian's Critique: Reflections on the Early Anti-Christian Persecutions

Break 11:00 – 11:30

11:30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM 2.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

EXPLORATIONS OF PEOPLEHOOD IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

Thematic Book Discussion

Presiding: Tony Keddie

Book (1): M. den Dulk, *Ethnic Stereotypes and the Letters of Paul*, Cambridge University Press, 2026

Book (2): P. Harland, *Ethnic Relations in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Chicago University Press, 2026

Discussants: Laura Carnevale (University of Bari Aldo Moro), Cavan Concannon (University of Southern California, Dornsife, Los Angeles, USA), Christy Cobb (University of Denver, USA)

Respondents: Matthijs den Dulk (Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands), Philip Harland (York University, Toronto, Canada)

General Discussion

11:30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM 2.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

LUKE & ACTS IN THEIR HISTORICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL, AND LITERARY CONTEXT

Presiding: Dorota M. Hartman, Fabrizio Marcello

GIOVANNI IBBA (Research Institute for the Study of Religions, Florence, Italy)

Poverty, Wealth, and Receptivity to Revelation in Luke–Acts

GIULIO MARIOTTI (Institute for Religious Studies R. Guardini, Trento, Italy // online)

Luke 23:28 and 4 Ezra 10:11 in the Context of First-Century Jewish Debate

FRANCESCA MINONNE (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy)

Working on Luke and His Language: Is Grammar the Key?

13:00 – Closing of the Meeting / Lunch (CEUB)

PROGRAMME UNITS & ABSTRACTS

(Programme Units are listed in alphabetical order)

Keynote Lecture

LAURA NASRALLAH (Yale University, New Haven, USA)

Making Canon, Practicing Allegory: Case Studies in Stone, Bone, and Papyrus

In the first- to the fifth-century Mediterranean world, people of high and low status were creating and elaborating canons in multiple media. Monumental epigraphy as well as small-scale efforts—such as the production and display of verses for divination, the use of Homeric lines in centones, the elaboration of the meaning of an authoritative text in a commentary—indicate literary and philosophical-theological experimentations. Objects available in the public square, whether divination devices or philosophical dossiers, expand our understandings of the formation of Christian canon(s) and the widespread development of practices of mind and body as humans engaged authoritative texts.

Contexts of Early Christianity

(Chair: John S. Kloppenborg)

MARIANNE BJELLAND KARTZOW (University of Oslo, Norway)

Neighborhoods of Marginals, Non-Humans, and More-Than-Humans: New Testament Entanglements and Intersections

There are many New Testament neighborhoods, but for most interpreters they remain only in the background. Using an interdisciplinary and intersectional neighborhood lens, this paper identifies and analyzes four gospel stories where neighbors and neighborhoods play significant roles: When John is born, the neighborhood plays an almost ritual role in rejoicing and gossiping to welcome and secure the child, but they are also afraid (Luke 1:53, 65); in the parable of the lost coin, the female neighborhood is compared to the angels of God (Luke 15:8-10); Nathanael is leaning towards a tree (his neighbor?) and is transformed from skeptical to enthusiastic (John 1:48); the man born blind needs the neighborhood to confirm his life history and his healing (John 9:8). What role did the neighborhood play in everyday experiences of life and death? What kind of responsibility did neighborhoods take for the marginalized and vulnerable (children, women, people with disabilities)? How did neighborhoods interact with nature, and in what way could the neighborhood be an image of the divine?

TONY KEDDIE (University of Texas, Austin, USA)

“The Way” as a Neighborhood Association in Acts of the Apostles and Roman Ephesos

During the building boom in second-century Ephesos, a new form of neighborhood-based sociality and collective agency emerged. Honorific inscriptions record at least four neighborhood associations: “the Androkleidai doing business in this place” (IvE 3079), “the Koresseitai from the gate to the stadium” (IvE 730), “the *plateia*” (IvE 3080), and “the people (working) in the *agora*” (IvE 672). In this paper, I build on Angela Kalinowski’s detailed studies of these Ephesian neighborhood inscriptions by considering how Christians might have negotiated the religious dynamics of these neighborhood associations. The artisans in certain neighborhoods performed work more closely tied to cults than others; for example, the Koressos district was known for producing textiles for the worship of Artemis Ephesia at the Artemision. I argue that Acts of the Apostles, an early second-century text produced in Ephesos (or another Aegean city with comparable social dynamics), imagines an ideal neighborhood-based social formation for Christians. Not simply a theological construction rooted in the prophecy of Isaiah, “the Way” (*hē hodos*), the title for Christ-followers in Acts (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; cf. 18:26), is an attempt at imagining a place for Christians in a busy Roman *polis* on the model of

neighborhoods: like *plateia*, *hodos* is most literally a street; the Way was made up of craftsmen such as “tentmakers” (Acts 18:3); like neighborhood collectives, it offered an alternative route to civic recognition outside the leading guilds; and like the Ephesian neighborhood associations, it arguably enabled craftsmen more flexibility in marketing their goods and services, such that Christians could avoid work directly entangled with cults and thus deemed idolatrous.

HARRY O. MAIER (Vancouver School of Theology, Canada)

Christ Religion as Neighborhood Cultural Invention

The traditional urban religion hypothesis relating to early Christianity holds that Christ religion was a means of overcoming alienation connected with living in cities in a period of urban decay. Christianity was a religious means of responding to a need for forming a sense of belonging and the creation of an intermediate space between the family and the larger *polis*. This hypothesis is in part dependent on a traditional understanding of cities as nameless spaces in which individuals are overcome by phenomena such as placelessness, cultural anomie, and fear. More recent urban sociology, however, sees cities as places of cultural invention and aspiration. Drawing on the study of lived religion as practice of everyday life and using this more recent exploration of cities as places of possibility, this paper investigates forms of Christ religion at the neighborhood level as the creation of spaces of innovation, the formation of connectivity, the promotion of tactics for practicing everyday life, development of interpersonal narrative configurations via ritual, and the expression of urban vitality.

EMILIANO R. URCIUOLI (University of Bologna, Italy)

You Shall Ignore Your Neighbor: Christ Religion and the Challenge of Everyday Social Exchange

Why do early Christ followers appear indifferent to their *vicini*? What is it about them that make them an unlikely, uninteresting, or unsuitable object of discourse and reflection? While grappling with the limits of the Leviticus command and its possible universal extension beyond kin (German: *Nächste*), early Christian spokespersons have remarkably little to say about those who are physically nearby and permanently next door (German: *Nachbar*). No ancient Christian writer undertakes the task of articulating a revised *éthique du voisin*, which, as the French psychoanalyst Hélène L’Heuillet argues, differs from an *éthique du prochain* precisely in dispensing with transcendently grounded moral imperatives. This paper explores the reasons behind early Christian literature’s striking disengagement from everyday neighborly relations, arguing that one important factor may have been its hostility toward the dominant form of religiosity that most closely mirrored the social logic of neighborship: what Stanley Stowers calls the Religion of Everyday Social Exchange (RESE). Neighborship is grounded in reciprocal, circumstantial exchange. The neighborhood constitutes a Maussian microcosm of tacit reciprocity, where favors are expected to circulate and mutual dependence structures everyday life. After all, no genuine imitator of Christ would claim to love a neighbor as oneself while expecting something in return.

Discussion of Books

(Chair: Luca Arcari)

Book Discussion (1)

C. Johnson Hodge, *The God of This House: Christian Domestic Cult before Constantine*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2025

Discussants: Maria Dell’Isola (Max Weber College, University of Erfurt, Germany); Nicola Denzey Lewis (Claremont Graduate University, California, USA)

Respondent: Caroline Johnson Hodge (College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA)

Book Discussion (2)

A. Destro & M. Pesce, *Gli Atti degli apostoli*, Marsilio, 2026

Discussants: Luca Arcari (University of Naples Federico II), Marida Nicolaci (Theological Faculty of Sicily – San Giovanni Evangelista, Palermo, Italy), Daniele Tripaldi (University of Bologna)

Respondents: Adriana Destro & Mauro Pesce (University of Bologna)

Discourses and Practices around Jesus in the Early Modern and Modern Period

(Chairs: Miriam Benfatto and Cristiana Facchini)

ANDRÁS KISS (University of Jewish Studies, Budapest, Hungary)

Reclaiming Jesus, Judaizing Christ: Modern Jewish Appropriations of Jesus and the Polemics of Identity

This paper challenges the common view that the Jewish reclamation of Jesus was a nineteenth-century phenomenon shaped mainly by emancipation and the Protestant search for the historical Jesus. I argue instead that it marked the modern intensification of an older strategy of cultural resistance through adoption. Focusing on Jewish writings from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, I examine how Jewish thinkers employed this premodern paradigm to appropriate Jesus for building Jewish communal and individual identity. My argument is twofold. First, modern Jewish representations of Jesus did not emerge as a radical break with a uniformly hostile premodern tradition; they developed from earlier attempts to reclaim Jesus as a Jewish figure and to detach him from Christian theological claims, continuing a strategy going back to Antiquity. Second, Jewish thinkers appropriated not only Jesus himself but also elements of Christian theological language and symbolism. This is especially visible in interpretations of Isaiah's Suffering Servant, where Christological motifs were transferred to Israel and used to articulate a collective Jewish mission within a Christian cultural environment. Using the concepts of counter-history and polemical identity formation, the paper argues that the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus served Jewish self-legitimation and challenged Christian claims.

DARIUSZ PNIEWSKI (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland)

The Rhetorical Figure of Jesus and the Industrial Revolution

The rapid development of science and technology in the first half of the nineteenth century was accompanied by a proliferation of scientific texts and works intended to promote its achievements—namely, the technologies and machines that were becoming more widespread at the time. These discoveries and inventions required the creation of appropriate narrative and poetics. Metaphors and the language of such texts were unprecedentedly new and close to Romantic literature, yet they did not shy away from allusions to religious imagery and myths deeply rooted in culture. From the former, the figure of Jesus was borrowed and secularized, much like in historical research, while the latter provided simple associations—synecdoches of superhuman strength and self-sacrifice. A characteristic feature was the linking of the figure of Jesus with the figures of Prometheus and Hercules, as well as with the ideas and biographies of ancient philosophers.

NORBERT NAGY (University of Oxford, UK)

Constructing the Historical Jesus on the Religious Margins: Radical Scholarship and Modern Biblical Culture

This paper examines how radical and dissenting religious thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constructed alternative representations of Jesus outside dominant academic and ecclesiastical institutions. While modern Historical Jesus research is commonly narrated through the rise of German critical scholarship, far less attention has been paid to the role of

Nonconformist and Unitarian networks in shaping modern biblical discourse. Drawing on a Transylvanian Unitarian case study, the paper explores how interpretations of Jesus developed within the intellectual culture of a religious minority and circulated through pamphlets, religious periodicals, lectures, correspondence, and denominational publications, extending beyond elite theological centers through expanding print culture and transnational religious communication. Rather than treating Historical Jesus research as a neutral scholarly enterprise, the study approaches it as a historically situated form of biblical reception deeply connected to confessional identity, institutional authority, and modern religious debate. By recovering these neglected trajectories of radical scholarship, the paper highlights the contested processes through which modern representations of Jesus were produced and disseminated.

JILL HICKS-KEETON (University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA)

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* and Contests over Canon in the Modern U.S.

"The Bible" is ever in flux, with contours continually struggled over by social actors in webs of power relations that prioritize some bibles over others. This paper explores what scholars of the Bible could gain methodologically if we take seriously the title of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* (1895 and 1898) and treat her project not as a work of biblical interpretation but rather as a competing canon. Stanton's controversial publication is often described as "not a Bible" as scholars prefer to see the work as commentaries on canonical texts. Yet early reviews in newspapers reveal that the public rejected *The Woman's Bible* in large part because they perceived it as a potential threat to the bibles already in their hands and homes. Even so, disappointed present-day Amazon reviewers excoriate it as "not a Bible" as they reject its first-wave feminist commitments. Taking a cue from such receptions, this paper presents Stanton as a "scripturalizer" and argues that doing so helps us better attend to the power dynamics inherent in the construction of canon in any conflicts over "the Bible."

Early Christian Writings and Roman Law

(Chairs: Martina Carandino and Paolo Costa)

GIACOMO AIAZZI (Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy)

Jesus' Illegal Imagination and the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Lk 16:1-9)

Parables constitute a highly imaginative element within the Gospels: through these simple stories we can penetrate Jesus' own perspective of the world and the relationships between humanity and God. At the same time, by means of strangeness and oddness, which challenge the common *Weltanschauung*, they encourage their listeners to re-shape and re-interpret reality. Unlike fantasy, imagination has its roots in the vividness of daily life, grounded in the social and economic setting of the era. But what happens when imagination is stimulated not only by extravagance, but also by actions outside legal boundaries? What does it mean, for a Gospel's reader, to imagine a different kind of reality, such as the one portrayed in some parables, based on characters and situations that sometimes clearly go against the law? This approach informs our reading of the parable of the "unjust steward" (Lk 16:1-9). By confronting the Gospel's narrative with legal and juridical documentary sources (especially literary and papyrological) and contextualizing the parable in the ancient debt and credit economic system, we aim to understand the steward's ἀδικία, and its connection with his φρόνησις. What does it mean for Jesus—and for the parable's readers—to choose a negative character as a model for a new mode of thought?

GIOVANNI RIBUOLI (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Rome, Italy)

Land, Talents and the Pearl: Whose Were They? And Why Should One Buy the Field?

The parables' juridical background remains largely understudied: both historical and hermeneutical understanding of those key moments are involved. In my intervention, I take into consideration Mt 13:45-46 (Gospel of Thomas 76) and 25:14-30: money or precious goods are involved, somebody acquires something else but then somebody else asks for it. The credit and trust relationship that binds together the people involved, the exchange of money and precious goods, and the timing link these episodes directly to both Roman and Jewish law's distinction between property and possession. While Roman law scholars contested that there would be need to buy the field in order to acquire the pearl lawfully, the excessive action elucidates the reasons why the sowing of the talent is unacceptable, not merely by moral implications. Such was the case in first-century CE Palestine, where the process of urbanization brought many people out of traditional property into civic life with many properties rapidly changing hands. Still, talents and the pearl could not constitute property, but a possession: Roman law would not allow the property of a slave, albeit a *peculium* was widely accepted. Rabbinical tradition would neither accept that goods were given to slaves as property.

ANDREA DI LENARDO (Ca' Foscari University of Venice / University of Udine / University of Trieste, Italy)

Paul's Politics and the Experience of Roman Legal Authority

This paper reconsiders Paul's political thought in light of his repeated encounters with Roman judicial authority and episodes of legal assessment under imperial administration. Rather than treating texts such as Romans 13:1-7 as abstract theological formulations, it argues that they should be read against the background of Paul's lived experience with civic and provincial courts. A close reading of Acts—especially the episodes in Thessalonica, Corinth under Gallio, and Ephesus, all of which occur prior to the composition of Romans—reveals a recurring pattern in which Roman or Roman-aligned authorities consistently decline to prosecute Paul, often distinguishing between religious disagreement and legally actionable offenses such as *vis*, *seditio/stasis*, and *maiestas*. The paper further situates Paul within the broader spectrum of Second Temple Jewish political currents, ranging from accommodation to Roman rule to more radical forms of anti-imperial resistance. Within this background, Paul's stance appears as a reconfiguration of political categories within an eschatological and cosmological horizon. The argument advanced is that Paul's political thought emerges from the interaction between concrete legal experience and competing Jewish ideological frameworks under Roman imperial rule.

SILVIA VIARO (University of Padua, Italy)

Pliny's Doubts, Trajan's Rescript, and Tertullian's Critique: Reflections on the Early Anti-Christian Persecutions

This paper examines the dogmatic and procedural tensions experienced by Roman criminal law during the early Principate in the face of spreading Christianity, tracing the development of the debate between imperial authority and Christian apologetics. The investigation focuses, in first instance, on the epistolary consultation between Pliny the Younger and Trajan (epist. 10.96-97). The perplexities of the governor—who had already executed several Christians and forced others to formally recant from what he considered a *superstitio prava et immodica*—received a peculiar response from the Emperor. Becoming binding law for his successors, Trajan's rescript issued procedural directives, partially contradictory, without providing any qualification of the *crimen* subject to prosecution. Tertullian's subsequent critique in the *Apologeticum* (2.6-8) builds directly upon this ground. This research evaluates whether the African writer's harsh confutation («prohibet inquiri... et mandat puniri») should be dismissed as mere apologetic rhetoric or constitutes a legally grounded rebuttal. While recent international scholarship tends to focus on the cultural reception of the correspondence, the contribution of Roman law studies allows for a re-reading of this textual sequence, interpreting Tertullian's text as a rigorous assessment of procedural legitimacy.

Explorations of Peoplehood in the Ancient Mediterranean

(Chairs: Maia Kotrosits and Philip A. Harland)

Thematic Book Discussion

Books under discussion:

M. den Dulk, *Ethnic Stereotypes and the Letters of Paul*, Cambridge University Press, 2026

P. Harland, *Ethnic Relations in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Chicago University Press, 2026

In light of two recent books on ethnicity in the ancient world, the unit will consider where we stand and what directions we may head in the comparative study of peoples, processes of identification, and ethnographic discourses.

Discussants: Laura Carnevale (University of Bari Aldo Moro), Cavan Concannon (University of Southern California, Dornsife, Los Angeles, USA), Christy Cobb (University of Denver, USA)

Respondents: Matthijs den Dulk (Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands), Philip Harland (York University, Toronto, Canada)

From the History of Exegesis to Reception History and Beyond

(Chairs: Laura Carnevale and Edmondo Lupieri)

CLARK R. BATES (Forge Theological Seminary, Summerville, South Carolina, USA)

Χωρίς or Χάρις? How a Textual Variant in Heb 2:9 Became an Orthodox Shibboleth in the Late-Antique Church

In Hebrews 2:9, the dominant textual tradition states that Christ tasted death “by the grace of God” (χάριτι Θεοῦ). This reading is supported by the vast majority of Greek manuscripts and versional witnesses and is adopted in most modern critical editions. However, a minority reading—attested in a small number of medieval Greek manuscripts—claims that Christ tasted death “apart from God” (χωρίς Θεοῦ). Despite its limited manuscript support, this variant reading was already known to Origen of Alexandria, who regarded both readings as exegetically viable. By the fourth century, χωρίς Θεοῦ was adopted by Dyophysites such as Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus. In the sixth century the reading was condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople (553 CE). By the time of the Ps.-Oecumenian catena on the Pauline epistles (ca. seventh century) commentators explicitly accused those who appealed to the variant reading of “Nestorianism,” a charge subsequently transmitted to later New Testament catenae. This paper examines the reception history of the χωρίς Θεοῦ variant from the time of Origen to the middle Byzantine period, highlighting Dyophysite argumentation in favor of the more difficult reading and arguing that, while this variant can be explained as an orthographical error, its entanglement in the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries was influential in its subsequent marginalization within the Greek manuscript tradition.

J. ANDREW DOOLE (University of Innsbruck, Austria)

Barabbas in Modern Fiction

In the four canonical gospels Barabbas is a one-dimensional figure without a single word of dialogue. Apocryphal literature and patristic commentary tended to portray him as particularly evil, a serial criminal or mass murderer with no hope of redemption. The sole exception appears to be Jacob of Serugh, who saw him as a typos for Adam, “son of the father” and representative of humanity. This idea of Barabbas as the prototypical human in whose place Jesus died makes him an ideal identification figure for modern fictional accounts of his life. There are an array of novels that take up the task of providing a backstory and/or sequel for Barabbas: Marie Corelli, *Barabbas: A Dream*

of the World's Tragedy (1896); Pär Lagerqvist, *Barabbas* (1950); John Marcus Tomkins, *Barabbas & The Sword of Sacrifice: A Zealot's Journey to God* (2003); Michael W. Hinkle, *The Butane Gospel* (2010); Kevin L. Brooks, *The Lost Gospel of Barabbas Trilogy* (2014, 2016, 2019); and M. D. House, *I Was Called Barabbas* (2019) and *Pillars of Barabbas* (2021). I briefly outline the content of the modern Barabbas novels and demonstrate that they are fan-fiction akin to ancient hagiography and thus provide important insights into reception history in popular culture.

DANIELE PASSEGGI (University of Naples Federico II, Italy)

“This Golgotha of the Contemporary World”: John Paul II and the Pilgrimage to Auschwitz-Birkenau (2–10 June 1979)

This contribution examines Pope John Paul II's pilgrimage to Poland (2–10 June 1979) through a thick description based on major Italian Catholic periodicals, including *La Civiltà Cattolica*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, *Famiglia Cristiana*, and *Avvenire*. By analyzing these sources, the paper reconstructs the ritual and symbolic meaning of Wojtyła's gestures and explores their role in shaping Catholic interpretations of the memory of the Shoah. Attention is devoted to the Pope's visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau on 7 June 1979, the first time a pontiff entered a concentration and extermination camp—an event that became central to John Paul II's pontificate and deeply influenced subsequent papal approaches to Holocaust remembrance. The paper also addresses a significant gap in Italian historiography on the memory of the Shoah, where the role of Christian cultures has often remained marginal despite the importance of Christian imagery in both Italian society and the transnational construction of Holocaust memory. The paper explores biblical reception not only as a theological phenomenon, but also as a cultural and political process shaped by ritual practices, collective memory, and mass communication.

JEFF TRIPP (Rock Valley College, Rockford, Illinois, USA // online)

The Reception of Jesus's Death as a Suicide

As portrayed in the New Testament Gospels and in contemporary Christianity, Jesus moves toward his death with knowledge and intent. While descriptions of his death as “voluntary” or “self-sacrificial” are easy to find, some Christians and critics of Christianity have gone further, using the explicit language of suicide. This interpretation appears consistently from the third century forward. Furthermore, two separate streams of thought lead to this interpretation: a theological one that tries to resolve the paradox of an all-powerful, all-knowing God who nevertheless is killed by humans, and an ethical one that attempts to justify other suicides by highlighting their similarity to Jesus's death. Here, we trace the interpretation of Jesus's death as a suicide from the early patristic era to contemporary popular and internet culture.

Gender Issues in Early Christianity

(Chairs: Maria Dell'Isola and Mario Resta)

TAYLOR PETREY (Kalamazoo College, Michigan, USA)

Castration Curiosity in the Second Century

Since Matthew Keuffler's influential text *The Manly Eunuch*, the study of Christian eunuchs has generally focused on the development of a new category of masculinity in late antiquity. There is merit to this perspective, though it often does not account for earlier religious eunuchs like the galli who provided an alternative masculinity long before Christians. This paper offers two new perspectives to reorient the study of eunuchs in early Christianity. First, it examines more closely the evidence for Christians seeking or accomplishing castration in the second century. The debates about eunuchs and the meaning of Jesus's saying on eunuchs appear much earlier than typically

understood. Second, it expands our understanding of various second-century Christian teachings about androgyny. Sayings attributed to Jesus in these years such as making the male and the female “one and the same” (GTh 22, et al.) have often been understood as referring to ascetic practices. By locating these and other teachings in the context of second-century debates about the galli and Jesus’s teaching on eunuchs, we can identify a theme of castration curiosity in second-century Christianity that extends beyond sexual renunciation into bodily modification.

ALIYAH EL MANSY (University of Münster, Germany)

Early Christian Attitudes Towards Female Work and Labor

The Mary and Martha pericope in Luke 10:38–42 renders visible a tension that runs throughout early Christianity: the simultaneous necessity and theological devaluation of labor. This study examines how female work was conceptualized, practiced, and commemorated in the early Christian movement and its Greco-Roman and early Jewish environment, arguing that attitudes toward women’s labor were never timeless norms but contextually determined negotiations shaped by gender, social status, economic situation, and community affiliation. Drawing on ancient literary discourse, epigraphic evidence, and early Jewish and Christian texts, the study analyzes the semantic range of key labor terminology (διακονία, κοπιάω, ἔργον), evaluates imperial-period inscriptions, and reads the Mary-Martha pericope against this broader backdrop. The findings reveal that female labor was evaluated relationally rather than intrinsically; that epigraphic sources document women’s economic agency and professional identity across status groups in ways literary sources systematically underrepresent; and that early Christ groups created at least temporarily a framework in which women’s labor gained new visibility, before pastoral epistles and later tradition progressively obscured that space.

KLAZINA STAAT (Free University Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Felicity’s Servile Agency: Who Wrote the Passion of Perpetua and Felicity?

This paper readdresses the question of female literacy and authorship in the Latin Passion of Perpetua and Felicity by focusing on the figure of Felicity. Although her name frequently appears in the title, Felicity receives scant narrative attention in the early-third-century CE martyrdom account and has been largely overlooked in modern scholarship. Drawing on the limited information the Passio provides about her identity—as an enslaved woman, a member of Perpetua’s household, and a person experienced in childbirth—this paper proposes a narrative that places Felicity at the center. It explores her possible roles as a servile worker and considers her potential contribution to the production of the text recounting her martyrdom. Building on recent scholarship that foregrounds the involvement of enslaved individuals in the production and transmission of (religious) texts (e.g. Moss, *God’s Ghostwriters*, 2024), I argue for a more nuanced understanding of authorship in the Passio, highlighting the possible literacy and textual agency of enslaved individuals such as Felicity, as well as the anonymous redactor. This lens opens up broader questions about authorship at the intersection of literacy, social status, and gender in early Christianity.

MARTA MICILLO (University of Naples Federico II, Italy)

Women on the Threshold: Sacred Space and Gendered Ecclesiastical Order in the Synod of Laodicea

During the fourth century CE, the progressive definition of Christian ecclesiastical order also passed through the regulation of women’s presence within communal and liturgical space. This paper examines this process, initiated with canon 19 of Nicaea, through the Synod of Laodicea, with particular attention to canons 11 and 44, in order to understand how Laodicea contributed to the production of an ecclesiastical topography of gender. The women mentioned or presupposed by these canons do not appear as irrelevant presences: the very need for normative intervention points

to forms of visibility, prominence, or proximity to sacred space that were perceived as problematic. Yet this visibility was brought back within more clearly defined boundaries, through the distinction between communal participation and liturgical function. The paper proposes to read the Laodicean legislation not as a mere repertory of prohibitions, but as a site in which gender difference was historically produced. The question is not whether women were included in or excluded from the ecclesiastical order, but rather how their presence was positioned, delimited, and made compatible with the institutional construction of Christian authority.

Gospel of Thomas, Nag Hammadi, and Gnosticism

(Chairs: Andrea Annese, Francesco Berno, Claudio Gianotto)

WILLIAM ARNAL (University of Regina, Canada)

Beyond “Diversity”: Nag Hammadi as Lens for Reconceiving Christian Origins

What if Christianity had died in antiquity? What if we didn’t have the New Testament? What if we discovered a cache of papyrus codices at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, and had only these documents to reconstruct an ancient religious movement and its beginnings? How would this change the shape of our imagination of Christianity? This paper explores what an alternative history of Christian beginnings would look like under such circumstances, with a view to establishing something of an antidote to the canonical bias that still shapes our field. The paper focuses especially on the central role of demiurgical speculation, ethnogenetic reconfiguration, and transformation rituals as central to this reconceived Christianity. It then briefly indicates the import of these findings for a modified approach to the first-century sources that we actually have.

EDUARD IRICINSCHI (University of Erfurt, Germany)

Reading the Gospel of Thomas with the Manichaeans

The Gospel of Thomas has been analyzed over the past half-century as a source for the historical Jesus, a document of early Christianity, and, often, as the foremost example of ancient gnostic spirituality. Ancient Manichaeans, followers of the third-century mystic Mani, also engaged with the enigmatic allure of the Gospel of Thomas as a religious text. The first generation of Manichaean religious intellectuals, active in the third and fourth centuries CE, appear to have not only been familiar with the Gospel of Thomas—since they referred to some of its sayings directly and alluded to it in indirect references—but also to have been inspired by it as they aimed to imitate it in their religious discourses. The present paper has three parts. In the first, I analyze the relevance of Thomas Didymos (the Twin) to a religious founder, Mani, who claimed to have received all his secret wisdom as revelations from his Heavenly Counterpart, the Twin. In the second, I present a close inventory of all the literary references to the Gospel of Thomas in Manichaean religious texts. In the third and final part, I advance a series of conjectures about the ancient literary production and circulation of themes, topics, and texts across religious boundaries, paying special attention to the polysemic relevance of the Gospel of Thomas within different ancient spiritual traditions.

MARIA LUCIA ABAURRE GNERRE (Federal University of Paraíba, Brazil)

The Concept of “Indian Gnosticism” in the Works of Raniero Gnoli

This paper critically examines the reception of Gnostic traditions within twentieth-century Italian Indology, focusing particularly on the interpretation developed by the renowned scholar Raniero Gnoli (1960). Starting from the modern reformulation of Gnosticism after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices (Robinson, 1977) and adopting a perspective of Gnosticism regarded as one of the most active, prolific, and competitive movements within early Christianity during its first centuries (Gianotto, 2018), the paper investigates how scholars such as Giuseppe Tucci (1949), Mircea Eliade (1969), and

Heinrich Zimmer (1951) associated certain currents of Tantrism, Vajrayāna Buddhism, and Kashmir Śaivism with forms of spiritual gnosis centered on initiatory knowledge and inner transformation. Special attention is given to Gnoli's interpretation of Abhinavagupta's *Tantrasāra* in *Essenza dei Tantra* (1960), where the expression "Indian Gnosticism" is explicitly employed to describe the metaphysical and contemplative dimensions of Śaiva Tantrism and Upanishadic traditions. The paper also examines possible symbolic and historiographical connections between the Gospel of Thomas (Annese, 2019), Syriac Thomasine Christianity in India, and Indian traditions of interiority (Massi, 2016), considering the broader circulation of religious ideas along the Eastern Mediterranean and its eastward trade and pilgrimage routes (Gnerre, 2015). Methodologically, the research adopts a comparative exegetical and historiographical approach, combining textual analysis and history of religions. The study further discusses contemporary critiques of the category "Gnosticism," especially those proposed by Karen King (2003). This paper aims to assess the continued applicability of the concept of Indian Gnosticism as theorized by Gnoli in light of current scholarly frameworks.

Issues of Method: New 'Secular' Approaches to Early Christian Research

(Chairs: Roberto Alciati and Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli)

LAURA FELDT (University of Bergen, Norway / RADHEART)

Radical Habits of the Heart and Asceticism – Testing the Theoretical Framework of RADHEART on *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*

In this paper, I first present the key terms and dimensions of the theoretical and methodological framework developed for the project Radical Habits of the Heart – Emotions, Embodiment and Individual Strong Commitment in Ancient Religions (RADHEART): experience-oriented anthropology, the aesthetics of religion, and the three analytical axes of textuality, mediality, and practice. I use the framework and the analytical axes in an analysis of the late fourth-century Greek *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, focusing on the framing sections and on chapter VIII on Apollo. I analyze the embedded models of strong commitment and the role of the senses, emotions, and embodiment overall; I look at the mediality of the narrative and how it affords the embodied and emotional engagement of the audience, using theories of enactive narration, and I discuss reading as a context of practice. I argue that HGM overall should be read not primarily as a travelogue that offers insight into the journey of the company from Palestine who visited the monks in Egypt, but as devotional literature, training strong commitment practices and ascetic self-formation. In the text, narrative strategies that afford fascination and awe are interwoven with strategies that mobilize the sensorimotor system and strengthen the audience's embodied and emotional engagement. The narrative trains the devoted audience's embodied commitment narratively and emotionally, especially via a performative emotional economy mobilizing fear and disgust vis-à-vis religious practices portrayed as illegitimate.

SILVIA GÓMEZ JIMÉNEZ (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain / RADHEART)

Senses, Sacred Architecture and Religious Commitment in Late Antique Poetry

This paper examines how Late Antique Christian poetry fostered religious commitment through emotions, embodiment, and sensory experience. Developed within the framework of the RADHEART project, the study combines philological analysis, sensory approaches, and the aesthetics of religion to explore how religious media shaped the experience of the faithful in ritual contexts. The research focuses on literary epigrams and *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* from the Western Roman Empire (4th–6th centuries CE), especially poems composed for the construction of churches and baptisteries. Rather than treating these texts only as literary or doctrinal works, the paper approaches them as

performative religious media integrated into sacred architecture and liturgical practice. Through references to movement, sound, ritual action, and bodily experience, the poems shaped emotional dispositions connected to Christian identity and communal belonging. Two types of examples illustrate this approach: consecration poems present sacred architecture as a space activated through liturgical performance and collective sensory experience; poems placed on church doors and other liminal architectural spaces emphasize the threshold between the profane and the sacred, guiding the bodily and emotional responses of worshippers. By analyzing the interaction between poetry, architecture, sensory experience, and emotion, this paper argues that Late Antique Christian verse actively promoted enduring practices of devotion and religious commitment.

ROBERTO ALCIATI (University of Florence, Italy)

How Radical was Late Antique Religion? Testing “Total Devotion” in the Writings of Clement of Alexandria

When applied to historical religions, the concept of ‘radicalism’ often presupposes an unalterable, strict code of practices and ideas, frequently echoing modern definitions of fundamentalism. However, applying such categories to Late Antiquity requires cautious methodological reflection. Seeking an empirical and emic approach, Laura Feldt suggested replacing the problematic notion of ‘radical religion’ with that of ‘total devotion’ (2023). This paper tests this theoretical shift through a close reading of Clement of Alexandria’s writings, which are foundational for the development of early Christian asceticism. By analyzing Clement’s ascetic vocabulary and ideals, this paper addresses to what extent the paradigm of ‘total devotion’ improves our historical understanding of ancient religious rigor compared to the more ambiguous category of radicalism.

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN (Aarhus University, Denmark)

A Plea for Theoretical and Methodological Consilience in the Study of Formative Christ Religion

New approaches to the study of religion often appear to contradict each other. They are often presented as the only way to achieve a plausible analysis of what ‘religion truly’ is. There are good social reasons for this: advocates of new theories, models, and methods obviously want to promote their approach as unrivaled and genuinely novel in order to attract funding and enhance their scholarly reputation. Sadly, though, the social need for self-promotion often prevents the collaboration that could be achieved through greater acknowledgment of the need for consilience, thereby contributing to a more profound and plausible understanding of early Christian religion. In this presentation, I argue for the necessity of consilience, and present a model implicating the need to consider the sociological, psychological, and biological dimensions in the study of culture, society, and religion in general, and of specific religions, including formative Christ religion, in particular. Furthermore, I posit that this can be achieved from an overarching evolutionary perspective that considers the contingencies of historical development and acknowledges the impact of evolutionary selection mechanisms beyond natural selection when accounting for human evolution.

Jewish History, Hellenistic Judaism, and Septuagint Studies

(Chairs: Davide Dainese, Dario Garribba, Anna Mambelli, Marco Vitelli)

SARIT COFMAN-SIMHON (Emunah College of Fine Arts and Design, Jerusalem, Israel)

The First Mystery Play: Jewish Hellenistic Exagoge

Ezekiel (Ezechielus), a Jewish tragedian who lived in Alexandria probably during the second century BCE, was the author of the first known Jewish playtext. His Exagoge (Exodus), originally written in Greek, has not survived in its entirety, but the seventeen scenes that have reached us are of incomparable value. This paper explores how Church Fathers espoused the Exagoge as a type of

Mystery Play (written prior to Christianity), who made use of the play and for what purpose, and what circumstances facilitated its incorporation into the Jewish canon. Mystery plays are early medieval vernacular dramas that dramatized Bible stories, ranging from Creation to the Last Judgment, often focusing on the life and Passion of Christ. The fragmented surviving text of Exagoge (meaning “leading out,” rather than “exit”) covers only the first parts of the Exodus story. The play has had no presence in Jewish culture, and it was Hellenic, Roman, and Christian scholars who translated, interpreted, preserved, and put the play to their own use. Only in the nineteenth century did German Jewish intellectuals reclaim Exagoge as a Jewish work. Since then it has been fully incorporated into the Jewish discourse on Hellenistic Judaism.

CAMILLA RECALCATI (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)

Magic and Incantation in Symmachus’ Psalter: Notes from Ps 57(58):6b

Recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in Septuagint lexicography. Yet significant gaps remain in the study of the vocabulary of later Greek translations of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament, the so-called Jewish revisions of the Septuagint. This paper, developed within the framework of the German-Israeli project A Digital Dictionary of Rare Lexemes in Symmachus’ Psalter, examines the translation techniques of Symmachus through the semantic field of magic. Departing from an analysis of Psalm 57(58):6b, it combines lexicographical analysis with the study of Symmachus’s translation technique, examining his lexical choices in relation to its possible Hebrew Vorlage, contemporary Greek usage, Jewish interpretative traditions, and his engagement with the Septuagint tradition. Particular attention is devoted to the hapax legomenon ἐπαστῆς and to specialized terminology connected with magic, incantation, and ritual practice.

EBERHARD BONS (University of Strasbourg, France) **WITH ANNA MAMBELLI** (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy) **& DANIELA SCIALABBA** (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, Italy)

Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint, Volume 2 – Major Results

Work on Volume 2 of the Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint is at a very advanced stage. The individual articles deal with important words in the Greek Bible, taking into account their background in classical and Hellenistic Greek literature, but also their future in ancient Jewish literature in Greek (e.g. Philo and Josephus), in the New Testament, and in early Christian literature. Volume 2 includes around 180 articles covering Greek words from the letter delta to the letter iota. Although not all articles are yet available in their final form, some important findings regarding the anthropological, historical, and theological vocabulary are already emerging. The aim of this paper is to present a representative selection of these findings, namely of the articles on the words ἐλπίς, ἴδομαι/ἡδονή, θλίβω/θλίψις, θνητός.

ANTONELLA BELLANTUONO (UCLouvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium)

Religious Coexistence and the Construction of Identity: Judaism in Hellenistic Egypt between Isis, Serapis, and the Septuagint

Religious coexistence is a persistent historical issue, with roots in antiquity, that has often generated a wide spectrum of social and political dynamics ranging from conflict and violence to accommodation and peaceful integration. The aim of this paper is to examine the interaction between Jewish monotheism and the religious landscape of Hellenistic Egypt, with particular attention to the cults of Isis and Serapis. It addresses how these cults were perceived within Jewish discourse, whether as theological challenges or cultural reference points, and to what extent their presence influenced the articulation of Jewish identity and belief. The analysis is divided into two parts. First, it investigates possible references to Hellenistic cultic terminology in the Septuagint and their role in delineating boundaries between Jewish and Egyptian religious worlds. Second, it explores the broader dynamics

of interaction and reinterpretation that shaped Jewish theological development in a pluralistic religious environment, highlighting processes of differentiation, adaptation, and reformulation.

Luke & Acts in Their Historical, Anthropological, and Literary Context

(Chairs: Michael A. Daise, Dorota M. Hartman, Fabrizio Marcello)

GIOVANNI IBBA (Research Institute for the Study of Religions, Florence, Italy)

Poverty, Wealth, and Receptivity to Revelation in Luke–Acts

Scholarship on poverty and wealth in Luke–Acts has largely focused on ethical, social, and economic concerns, emphasizing care for the poor, critique of wealth, and ideals of communal sharing. While acknowledging the importance of these perspectives, this paper argues that poverty and wealth also function as indicators of receptivity to divine action and revelation. A close reading of key Lucan passages—including the Magnificat (Luke 1), Jesus’ proclamation at Nazareth (Luke 4:18–19), the Beatitudes (Luke 6), and selected texts concerning wealth, poverty, and discipleship (Luke 14; 16; 18), together with relevant passages from Acts—suggests that poverty is frequently associated with openness to salvation, divine manifestation, and the capacity to perceive God’s action. Wealth, by contrast, often appears not merely as an economic condition but as a form of self-sufficiency that hinders receptivity and understanding. This pattern becomes particularly significant when viewed against broader conceptual frameworks of Second Temple Judaism. In a variety of Jewish texts, poverty is not always limited to socio-economic deprivation but may also signify humility, dependence, fidelity, and a disposition toward receiving divine knowledge, instruction, or eschatological salvation. Within this context, Luke’s treatment of poverty may be read not only in ethical and social terms but also as an epistemological and revelatory category.

GIULIO MARIOTTI (Institute for Religious Studies R. Guardini, Trento, Italy // online)

Luke 23:28 and 4 Ezra 10:11 in the Context of First-Century Jewish Debate

This paper offers a comparative analysis of Gospel of Luke 23:27–31 and 4 Ezra 10:1–11. These passages belong to two distinct narrative contexts: the Lukan passion narrative and the fourth vision of 4 Ezra, which concerns the destruction of Jerusalem. At a primary level, the two texts exhibit notable thematic and terminological correspondences, including motifs of mourning, maternal suffering, and barrenness. In addition, the imagery of the bridal chamber and the wedding night—on which the bridegroom-son dies—evokes Gospel of Luke 5:35, where Jesus’ death is implicitly framed as the death of the bridegroom. While both passages appear to draw on a shared tradition of lament—applied in one case to the passion of Jesus and in the other to the destruction of Jerusalem—they also reveal a degree of overlap and mutual reinterpretation between these two thematic spheres. On this basis, the paper explores whether 4 Ezra, also in light of the Lukan text, may be read as articulating a possible anti-Jesuan polemic, contrasting the destruction of Jerusalem and its people with the death of a single son.

FRANCESCA MINONNE (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy)

Working on Luke and His Language: Is Grammar the Key?

The research aims to shed light on the language of the Gospel according to Luke by examining some examples of the use of this text in early Christian exegesis from a grammatical perspective. Accordingly, the paper considers some relevant passages from the works of second- and third-century exegetes, namely Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, to determine how the language of the Gospel was explained grammatically to ensure its message was properly understood and divulged. Taking into account significant cases in which Luke’s text required specific attention to its pronunciation, word distinction, choice of verbal forms, and syntactic elements, we address the critical question: what can early Christian exegetical practice tell us about the language in which the Gospels were written

and the general process of written composition of the oral message? Notably, this research approach fosters a comprehensive view of early Christianity through the combined analysis of the New Testament text with its use in early exegesis, in order to gain a more detailed picture of how language shaped theological discourse in Christian hermeneutics.

Papyrology and Early Christ Groups

(Chair: Marco Stroppa)

MARCO STROPPIA (Papyrological Institute G. Vitelli, University of Florence, Italy)

An Anonymous Patristic Passage with a Quotation from Psalm 55(54) and the Iliad in an Unedited PSI Papyrus

A papyrus fragment from the PSI collection of Florence was used on both sides for writing, rotating the sheet by 90°. The text on the verso, which is mutilated, is written in a semi-cursive hand datable to the fifth century and contains two quotes identified with reasonable certainty: a passage from Psalm 55(54) and a portion of line 426 from Book VII of the Iliad. Partly due to the fragmentary nature of the artifact, it is unclear what type of text this might be; however, the hypothesis that it is a patristic passage raises interesting considerations regarding the coexistence of secular and religious citations.

PETER ARZT-GRABNER (University of Salzburg, Austria)

Covenants and Wills in Paul's Letters and in Documentary Papyri: Some Remarks on διαθήκη

As is well known, the Greek term διαθήκη is commonly used to mean “testament” or “will,” but apart from the Greek Bible, it is rarely—and never in documentary texts—used to mean “covenant.” To date, in relation to Paul's references to διαθήκη—even in passages where the meaning is “covenant”—scholars have generally referred only to “testaments.” This approach was recently challenged by a New Testament scholar who argued that the documentary evidence could be drawn upon much more extensively. This paper reexamines the evidence more critically, leading to a balanced and meaningful interpretation not only of Gal 3:15 but also of διαθήκη as used by Paul in the Corinthians correspondence.

Book Discussion:

C. Mayer & P. Arzt-Grabner (eds), *Galatians* (PKNT – vol. 5), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2026

Discussants: Dorota M. Hartman (University of Naples L'Orientale, Italy), Fabrizio Marcello (Catholic University of Paris)

Respondent: Peter Arzt-Grabner (University of Salzburg, Austria)

Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity

(Chairs: Matthias Morgenstern and Gal Sela)

Gender, Ritual Authority, and Boundary-Making (1)

GAL SELA (University of Regensburg, Germany)

The Talmudic Jesus and the Origins of Christianity: Gender, Law, and Magic

In the Babylonian Talmud, we find two parallel accounts that narrate an origin tale of Christianity from a playful Judean perspective. Unfolding as a dramatic conflict, framed by a depraved-sexuality motif, between Rabbi Yehoshua^c ben Peraḥyā and his close disciple Jesus, this narrative is one of the few rabbinic accounts that deals openly and critically with the Jewish heritage of Jesus in late antiquity, as a tannaitic charismatic sage. BT resolves the tension between these two archetypal holy

men through the contractual image of a clay brick, symbolizing that Jesus is no longer part of the covenant and is now under a new divine contract. In my paper, I rethink this account, especially its enigmatic ending, by drawing on extra-canonical renditions of Yehoshua' ben Peraḥyā in Aramaic incantation bowls, as well as in contemporary monastic parallels to this trope, to shed new light on this narrative. Building on a gender analysis of this tradition, I trace the depraved-sexuality motif, symbolized by a woman's ailing eyes, across all sources in order to offer a new reading of the Talmudic "parting of the ways" account of Christianity's origins.

JESSE MIROTZNIK (University of Vienna, Austria)

Whence Paganism? A Shared Jewish-Christian Etiology

If, in truth, there was only one God, then why did the Greeks and the Romans think so many other gods existed? Both ancient Jews and early Christians were troubled by this very same question, and sought to answer it in a number of overlapping ways. In this presentation, I focus on one explanation for the existence of "paganism" offered by both Jews and Christians in antiquity—an explanation termed "Euhemerism": namely, that the gods whom the Greeks and the Romans worshiped had in fact once been mere mortal men and women, who were ultimately remembered as divinities only because of their great contributions to humankind. Drawing on Hellenistic and Rabbinic Jewish sources (Wisdom of Solomon, Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, b. 'Avodah Zarah) alongside the major patristic euhemerists (Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, and Firmicus Maternus), I demonstrate how thinkers within these two traditions adopted this very same etiological theory for the very same intellectual purpose—to explain the existence of paganism. At the same time, I also seek to show how thinkers within each tradition reshaped and redirected this shared conceptual tool for each community's own polemical and exegetical ends. In presenting this comparative analysis, I pay particular attention to the recurring focus of these euhemeristic sources on specifically female deities, revealing gendered patterns in how both traditions imagined the human origins of female divinity.

LÁSZLÓ ODRÓBINA (University of Szeged; University of Public Service – Budapest; Saint Athanasius Greek Catholic Theological College – Nyíregyháza, Hungary)

Competing Constructions of Sacred Time: Calendrical Authority and Jewish-Christian Boundary-Making in Late Antiquity

Tradition attributes the fixing of the Jewish calendar (358/359 CE) to Hillel II, allegedly in response to the political and religious pressures of the reign of Constantius II. Although modern scholarship questions both the precise date and the traditional narrative, the gradual transition from an observational to a calculated calendar can be situated broadly within the fourth century. This development reduced the practical dependence of Jewish communities on centralized calendar announcements while simultaneously enabling the continued observance of sacred time throughout the diaspora. A comparable process unfolded within Christianity during the same period. The Council of Nicaea (325 CE) sought to establish a common celebration of Easter and to overcome regional disagreements concerning its calculation. This paper examines these developments not merely as parallel chronological processes but as competing constructions of religious authority and sacred time. Building on Daniel Boyarin's model of Jewish-Christian boundary-making, it asks whether calendrical regulation may be understood as one of the arenas in which rabbinic and Christian communities negotiated identity, authority, and difference in Late Antiquity. Through a comparative reading of Jewish and Christian sources, the paper argues that calendrical discourse constituted an important, though often overlooked, dimension of Jewish-Christian rivalry and boundary-making in the fourth century.

DORU DOROFTEI (Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany)

Between Halakhah and Sacrament: Competing Constructions of Holiness in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity

The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE compelled both emerging Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity to redefine the meaning and locus of holiness in a post-Temple world. Drawing on selected passages from the Mishnah, particularly Berakhot, Ḥallah, Ma'aserot, and Kelim, alongside early Christian reflections on Baptism and the Eucharist, this paper examines how the two traditions developed distinct yet related responses to the loss of the Temple cult. I argue that the Mishnah advances a program of Temple transference in which holiness is relocated into everyday life through ritual practice, purity regulations, blessings, and the observance of commandments, thereby transforming the household and the community into spaces of sanctity. Early Christianity, by contrast, increasingly concentrated sacred presence in Christ and in the sacraments, through which believers participated in divine reality and constituted a new temple community. While both traditions sought to preserve and reinterpret the biblical heritage of holiness, they did so through different theological and ritual strategies: Rabbinic Judaism sanctified daily life through halakhic practice, whereas Christianity mediated holiness through sacramental participation.

Oral & Written Sources (2)

PAUL RODRIGUE (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)

Jerome and the Jewish Sage: Rejection and Adoption of Rabbinic Material in the Church Father's Writings

This talk explores Jerome's relationship with his Hebrew teachers and examines two readings adduced from his commentaries and the Vulgate which match exegesis found in rabbinic and targumic sources. At the end of the fourth century CE, Jerome—a priest and theologian based in Bethlehem, whom Jews had been teaching Hebrew—set out to translate the Hebrew Bible into Latin: this work is now known as the Vulgate. As Hebrew was, in Jerome's view, the primordial language of humanity, the one in which God had created the world and composed Scripture, the Hebrew Bible was to be regarded as original and authoritative: it contained what Jerome called the "Hebrew truth" (*hebraica veritas*), as opposed to the Christian versions in circulation, i.e., the Septuagint and the *Vetus Latina*. This belief led Jerome to ask Jews, as well as non-Jewish experts in Hebrew Scripture, to teach him Jewish hermeneutics: he named these scholars his "Hebrews." When translating the Hebrew Bible, he therefore resorted to their interpretations, some of which he incorporated into the Vulgate and into his exegetical works. Importantly, these interpretations are sometimes preserved in extant rabbinic sources. If Jerome relied on his "Hebrews" to understand the Bible, he also paradoxically condemned those he named the σοφοί, i.e., the Jewish sages of his time, for their affiliation to the "synagogues of Satan." I thus demonstrate how Jerome's translation technique and exegesis reveal a tension between his reliance on Jewish hermeneutics and the theological conflict of the Church with the Synagogue.

MICHAEL MODINI (Independent Researcher, Australia)

The Markan Alphabet Theory

Did the author of the Second Gospel, or his sources, use sequences of keywords based on the Aramaic/Hebrew alphabet? The MAT proposes that the Aramaic/Hebrew alphabet is utilized within the earliest Gospel as a means of referencing and exploring key themes and moments in the Gospel's three major sequences. A mnemonic device based on the sequence of signs (letters) through which, in Jewish thought, God created the world, it was used initially to delineate the dominical discourses—possibly by Jesus himself. The system was then used to recall and transmit the miracle narratives and the Passion-Resurrection narrative during the pre-Greek, oral phase of the Gospel's development. Although this theory was formulated nearly ten years ago, it has not received attention from a range

of experts. Since John Davies' careful and respectful analysis (in "The Markan Alphabet Theory Examined"), the hypothesis has undergone further modifications which have not yet been assessed. It would benefit greatly from further investigation by specialists in the field.

GIUSEPPE VELTRI (University of Hamburg, Germany)

An Apology for Xanthippe: Women/Wives and Their Counterparts in the Hellenistic and Rabbinic World

This lecture examines a passage from Philo of Alexandria (*De fuga et inventione* 54–55), where the search for contradictions in rhetoric, language, and philosophy is personified as an intelligent woman named Sceptis. I argue that modern scholars have systematically underread this figure, treating *skepsis* merely as an abstract noun rather than recognizing it as a possible allegorical reference to a real woman. This interpretive oversight reflects a broader pattern: women in antiquity were often silenced, unnamed, or reduced to abstractions within the philosophical tradition. The central argument unfolds in two parts. First, although Philo was undoubtedly a man of his time, he deliberately embeds allusions—allegorical, metaphorical, and ironic—that his contemporaries would have recognized without explicit naming. His exegetical prose operates through a dense network of Greek and Hebrew intertexts, reflecting his identity as a Jewish intellectual shaped by Greek *paideia* and writing for a readership fluent in both traditions. Second, the personification of philosophical attitudes as female figures has deep historical roots: from *Sophia* in Hebrew wisdom literature and the Muses in Hesiod to Philosophy in Boethius' *Consolatio*. The lecture concludes with a provocative thesis: Philo's "wise woman called *Skepsis*" may be read as a veiled portrait of Xanthippe, the wife of Socrates, serving as a commentary on intellectual femininity in ancient philosophy. This figure of a woman who contradicts her husband recurs in rabbinic literature through characters such as Yalta, Ima Shalom, and Beruriah, suggesting a shared cultural imagination surrounding female philosophical dissent.

Re-Dating Early Christian Texts

(Chairs: Claudio Gianotto and Enrico Norelli)

Thematic Book Discussion

Books under discussion:

M. Vinzent, *Die älteste Sammlung paulinischer Briefe und die Entstehung der kanonischen Paulusbriefsammlung, Teile I-III* (in collab. with M. Bilby, J. Bull, K. Lance Lotharp), Narr Francke, 2025

M. Vinzent, *Von Paulus zu Saulus. Zwei Paulusbriefsammlungen im 2. Jahrhundert*, Herder, 2025

The Unit will engage two invited scholars and the broader audience in discussing the results of these two books recently published by Markus Vinzent. The first book (*Die älteste Sammlung*) provides the first Greek reconstruction of the Pauline 10-Letter Collection, attributed by the Patristic witnesses to Marcion of Sinope to have included it into his "New Testament." The first part gives the rationale and criteria of the reconstruction, building on a history of scholarship and the development of reconstruction criteria. In addition, it is a philological study of the 10-Letter Collection in comparison to the canonical 14-Letter Collection. The second book (*Von Paulus*) gives the social, economic, historical, and theological study of the reconstruction of the 10-Letter Collection and provides a side-by-side German translation of this Collection and the canonical German text. The panel will critically engage with the reconstruction, introduce the methodology, focus on the differing profiles of Paul in both collections, and discuss questions of dating, dependency, authenticity, and content.

Discussants: Harry O. Maier (Vancouver School of Theology, Canada), Jan Heilmann (Dresden University of Technology, Germany)

Respondent: Markus Vinzent (Max Weber College, University of Erfurt, Germany)