

48th International Symposium of Philosophy and Theology Professors

Signs of Our Times:

Religion and Politics in a
Fragmenting World

Trakošćan, Croatia
September 15 - 17, 2026

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UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ

Faculty of Catholic Theology



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Catholic Faculty of Theology
University of Zagreb



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Introduction to the Topic of the Symposium

The 48th International Symposium of Philosophy and Theology Professors, organized by the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb, in co-organization with the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Graz, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Ljubljana, and the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Sarajevo will take place in Hotel Trakošćan (near the Trakošćan Castle, Croatia) from 15th to 17th September 2026.

The topic of this year's symposium is **Signs of Our Times: Religion and Politics in a Fragmenting World**.

The contemporary moment is defined by the coexistence of multiple protracted crises - a condition often described as a "polycrisis" - in which political instability, armed conflicts, economic uncertainty, climate pressures and technological disruption driven by the AI-based revolution interact and reinforce one another.

This conference, organized by theological faculties, seeks to provide a rigorous interdisciplinary platform for examining the "signs of our times" - a phrase rooted in theological discernment and reaffirmed in the contemporary magisterium of the Catholic Church, particularly in the teachings of Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV, who emphasize the need for critical engagement with historical realities in light of faith, human dignity, and the common good.

Recent developments have also renewed interest in political theology as a critical framework for understanding how various theological concepts - such as sovereignty, authority, law, salvation - continue to form modern political imaginaries. From classical formulations (e.g., Carl Schmitt's thesis on the theological origins of key political concepts) to contemporary reinterpretations (e.g., Johann Baptist Metz's "new political theology" or more recent post-secular approaches), political theology provides tools for analyzing both the explicit and implicit theological dimensions of political life. It also opens normative questions about the legitimacy, limits, and responsibilities of religious actors in the public sphere, with particular emphasis on understanding of ongoing world crisis and conflicts.

Rather than treating religion and politics as separate domains, the conference explores their entanglement across historical, philosophical, sociological, psychological, legal, and theological perspectives. The relationship between religion and modern political orders, especially democracy, pluralism, and globalization, remains dynamic and contested, requiring renewed theological and broader academic reflection.

At a time when public discourse is increasingly polarized and marked by mistrust, this conference aims to cultivate a space of critical engagement and responsible dialogue. This conference emphasizes the importance of the relationship between religion and politics for interpreting and shaping the moral and institutional horizons of contemporary societies.

TUESDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2026

PROGRAMME

**Arrival and accommodation of participants at
Trakošćan Hotel, Trakošćan**

16.00 Welcome Coffee

17.00 Opening and welcoming speeches

Session I

Spirituality, Transcendence, and Healing in Times of Crisis

Chairperson: Nikola Vranješ

17.30 **Saved by Code? Techno-Gnosticism and the Defence of the
Human Person in *Magnifica Humanitas***

Mikolaj Martinjak

17.45 **Philosophy as Spiritual Therapy: Ancient Therapeutics of the
Soul in the Light of Contemporary Existential Crisis in a
Fragmenting World**

Mateja Pevec Rozman

18.00 **Spirituality, Trauma Healing and Human Resilience in Times
of Polycrisis: A Therapeutic Perspective**

Sara Jerebic

18.15 **Discussion**

19.00 **Dinner**

WEDNESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2026

Session II

Politics Beyond Postmodernism: Religion, Technology, and the Good Life

Chairperson: Mateja Pevec Rozman

9.00 From Weak Thought to Strong Thought? Contemporary Politics Beyond Postmodernism

Branko Klun

9.15 Political Religion and Human Dignity

Nenad Malović

9.30 Linguistic Community, Politics and Good Life. The Political Philosophy of Herbert McCabe, OP

Danijel Tolvajčić

9.45 A Girardian View of Politics and Its Christian-Theological Consequences

Mario Bernadić

10.00 Discussion

10.30 Coffee Break

WEDNESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2026

Session III

Divine and Human Authority: Sovereignty, Leadership, and Shared Power

Chairperson: Dubravko Turalija

11.00 The Divine and the Sovereign: The Intertwined Origins of Deity and Kingship in the Ancient Near East

Aljaž Krajnc

11.15 Democratizing Leadership? Shared Authority and Collective Responsibility in the Pentateuch

Katharina Pyschny

11.30 Things That Are Neither Caesar's Nor the Pope's

Dan Đaković

11.45 Discussion

13.00 Lunch

15.00 Coffee

WEDNESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2026

Session IV

Faith, Freedom, and Human Vulnerability in a Fragmented World

Chairperson: Dan Đaković

15.30 **Mental Health, Existential Vulnerability, and the Kerygma in a Fragmented World**

Tadej Stegu

15.45 **Religious Freedom as an Internationally Protected Human Right: Legal Challenges in the Republic of Slovenia**

Sebastian Valentan

16.00 **The Practice of Faith in the Face of Religious Fanaticism and Fundamentalism**

Nikola Vranješ / Josip Šimunović

16.15 **Discussion**

16.45 **Break**

WEDNESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2026

Session V

Family, Community, and Social Cohesion: The Foundations of a Sustainable Society

Chairperson: Katharina Pyschny

17.15 The Share of Family Households and School-Age Children in the Municipalities of Osijek-Baranja County as an Indicator of the Crisis of Subsidiarity in Croatia

Leonnell Radinski

17.30 Socio-Political Imagery for the Church in Eph 2,19-22: Citizenship and Household Metaphor

Tomislav Zečević

17.45 Elijah's Political Success and Religious Failure as an Example of the Worthlessness of Material Social Union Without Uniform Spiritual and Moral Duties of European Society

Dubravko Turalija

18.00 Discussion

19.00 Dinner

THURSDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2026

Session VI

Faith, Dialogue, and Social Cohesion: Religious Engagement in a Polarized World

Chairperson: Danijel Tolvajčić

9.00 Political-Christian Activism Through the Lens of IFS (Internal Family Systems)

Drago Jerebic

9.15 Public Speeches, Homilies, and Spiritual Reflections as Factors in Social Polarization and Cohesion

David Kraner

9.30 Linguistic Peace-Building in the Abrahamic Family House, Abu Dhabi - A Meshing of Religions, Scripts and Messages of Peace

Anna Marie Dillon / Sarah Hopkyns

9.45 Catholic Religious Education and Sustainable Development: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching

Gordana Barudžija

10.00 Plenary discussion

11.00 Symposium closing remarks

12.00 Lunch

Departure

Gordana Barudžija, Ph.D.

Education and Teacher Training Agency

Catholic Religious Education and Sustainable Development: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching

Care for the created world, as one of the values of Christianity, extends from biblical texts on creation and their interpretations to contemporary encyclicals. The Catholic Church offers a vision of sustainable development in Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015). Its dimensions go beyond a purely scientific and technological approach. In Religious Education, discussion of the origin of the world and its sustainability is not intended to compete with or deny scientific achievements, but to encourage students to reflect on what and how something happens in the world and with the world, why something happens in the world and with the world, and what the responsibility of human beings is in these processes – both individuals and communities.

Religious Education in the Croatian educational system is based on the Curriculum for the subject Catholic Religious Education for primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 10/19) from 2019, and teaching on sustainable development is based on the curriculum for the cross-curricular topic Sustainable Development – the Curriculum for the Cross-Curricular Topic Sustainable Development for Primary and Secondary Schools (Official Gazette 7/19) from the same year. The presentation analyses the two curricula and critically examines the possibilities of their correlation during primary and secondary education. The qualitative analysis of the two curricula aims to demonstrate their correlation potential and to indicate specific teaching possibilities in the teaching of Catholic Religious Education.

Keywords: *Catholic Religious Education, sustainable development, curriculum, Laudato si', teaching.*

Assoc. Prof. Mario Bernadić, Ph.D.

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Sarajevo

A Girardian View of Politics and Its Christian-Theological Consequences

Societies do not unite primarily around truth, but rather around a common enemy, who thereby assumes the role of a socially useful victim. Christianity, however, is the first great narrative in history to take the side of that enemy and ask: "What if the victim is innocent?" This statement may serve as a concise summary of the fundamental social intuition of the French cultural anthropologist René Girard (1923–2015), which emerges from his well-known mimetic theory. From the motif of rivalry in ancient myths, through the theme of desire in the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky, to the dramas and conflicts of contemporary politics, Girard consistently identifies the operation of the same primitive unconscious drives and mechanisms. According to him, these mechanisms become fully recognizable only through the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition, which brings them to the level of conscious awareness and thereby makes it possible to overcome them.

Keywords: *Girard, enemy, victim, politics, Bible.*

Assist. Prof. Dan Đaković, Ph.D.

*Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of
Zagreb*

Things That are Neither Caesar's Nor the Pope's

We usually defend the idea that the human conscience and truth are completely independent of any secular governance. We argue that while the state has a legitimate role in maintaining societal order, it becomes tyrannical when it attempts to control the moral, cultural, or religious identities of its citizens. But what is truly Caesar's, what is the Church's, what is God's, what is mine - that is never entirely clear. It is particularly interesting and controversial when this question is raised regarding intra-church relations, i.e. regarding Church authorities and their boundaries in relation to the conscience of the person.

Keywords: *man, state, Church, power, Pope, freedom, conscience, God.*

Assist. Prof. Anna Marie Dillon, Ph.D.

Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana

Assist. Prof. Sarah Hopkyns, Ph.D.

International Education and Lifelong Learning Institute,

University of St. Andrew's and Institute of Education at

University College London

Linguistic Peace-Building in the Abrahamic Family House, Abu Dhabi - A Meshing of Religions, Scripts and Messages of Peace

This paper presents findings from a walking ethnography of the Abrahamic Family House (AFH) in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The researchers visited the AFH on two occasions six months apart (October 2024 and June 2025) to explore this unique space – a religious complex which houses a mosque, a church and a synagogue in one location. These three places of worship are united by a secular space called the forum. The forum acts as an entry and exit space, and contains a reception area, a gift shop, café and an immersive light show highlighting the similarities between the three faiths of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The forum also includes the wall of intentions, a wall of tessellated triangular tiles on which visitors may write an ‘intention’ using a whiteboard marker. While walking, a qualitative nexus analysis naturally emerged as the researchers noticed the prevalence of top-down signage present in three languages – Arabic, English and Hebrew. This multi-modal presentation explores the types of signs visible within the public spaces, and notes how while the official signage equally represents the three languages, much of the bottom-up signage is less equal. In these times of crisis, viewing signage and handwritten messages such as these within a multi-faith place of worship in a global and intercultural city is uplifting, with a linguistic landscape such as this mediating rather than dividing communities (Shohamy & Waksman, 2008).

Keywords: *peace, linguistic landscape, unity, ethnography, multilingual.*

Assist. Prof. Drago Jerebic, Ph.D.

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana

Political-Christian Activism Through the Lens of IFS (Internal Family Systems)

Political-Christian activism is a complex public phenomenon in contemporary European societies. Public prayer, pro-life marches, Christian civic engagement, and political references to Christianity may express genuine faith, conscience, courage, solidarity, and responsibility for the common good. At the same time, they may also become instruments of identity defense, political legitimization, exclusion, power consolidation, or social polarization. The central question is therefore how the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model can help distinguish between mature Christian witness and forms of religious-political mobilization shaped by unresolved inner dynamics. IFS understands the human person as an inner system composed of a core Self and multiple parts, including wounded exiles and protective parts. Applied to the public expression of faith, this model shifts attention from external religious forms to the inner posture from which they arise. A Christian activist, community, or politician may act from Self-led qualities such as calmness, clarity, compassion, courage, and responsibility. Yet religious language and symbols may also be carried by protective parts seeking to manage fear, shame, humiliation, loss of influence, or the need for security and belonging. Particular attention is given to the European context, where many believers experience self-censorship, stigma, and the stereotype of backwardness. The public expression of faith may therefore be a courageous overcoming of shame, but it may also become a defensive reaction to perceived marginalization. IFS does not pathologize Christian activism; rather, it offers a psychologically differentiated framework for theological, pastoral, and sociopolitical discernment. Such an approach can contribute to a more responsible, dialogical, and less polarized Christian presence in the public sphere.

Keywords: *Internal Family Systems; political-Christian activism; public expression of faith; religious mobilization; Christian witness; protective parts; discernment.*

Assoc. Prof. Sara Jerebic, Ph.D.

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana

Spirituality, Trauma Healing and Human Resilience in Times of Polycrisis: A Therapeutic Perspective

The contemporary world is increasingly marked by overlapping crises that are no longer experienced as separate events, but as mutually connected realities shaping everyday life. War, migration, ecological instability, economic uncertainty, political polarization, and social fragmentation create a wider climate of insecurity that affects not only institutions and societies, but also the inner world of the person. In such a context, trauma cannot be understood only as the consequence of a single shocking event. It is increasingly linked to prolonged stress, cumulative strain, relational instability, and a weakened sense of safety, trust, and meaning.

This presentation explores the relationship between spirituality, trauma healing, and human resilience in the context of polycrisis from a therapeutic perspective. It argues that contemporary suffering is often cumulative, relational, and existential in nature, and that past traumatic experiences may shape present perception through projections, distrust, heightened threat sensitivity, and difficulties in emotional regulation. As a result, the experience of crisis is not only external, but also deeply mediated by personal history, attachment patterns, and unresolved wounds.

Drawing on trauma theory, attachment theory, pastoral psychology, and the psychology of religion, the presentation considers spirituality as a meaningful resource in processes of healing and resilience. Spirituality is approached not simply as a set of beliefs, but as a lived source of meaning, connection and hope. From this perspective, spiritually informed therapeutic work may help restore emotional balance, strengthen trust, and support the rebuilding of relational and existential coherence in a world shaped by uncertainty and fragmentation.

Keywords: *polycrisis, trauma; spirituality; resilience; therapeutic perspective.*

Prof. Branko Klun, Ph.D.

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana

From Weak Thought to Strong Thought? Contemporary Politics Beyond Postmodernism

One of the defining features of late modernity, often described as postmodernity, has been the imperative of deconstruction. Gianni Vattimo captured this intellectual orientation with the notion of weak thought (*pensiero debole*), which challenges claims to “strong” foundations, universal truths, and fixed identities. Within this perspective, metaphysical concepts as well as political, cultural, and social identities are understood as historically contingent constructions whose authority frequently rests on mechanisms of exclusion and violence. In the political sphere, weak thought has found expression in forms of radical pluralism, democratic contestation, and the continuous critique of power.

Recent political developments, however, suggest a growing dissatisfaction with this paradigm. Across diverse political contexts, one can observe a renewed appeal to stronger forms of collective identity, political authority, and normative orientation. The postmodern deconstruction of sexual, social, national, and cultural identities increasingly encounters resistance and appears to be losing some of its persuasive force.

This paper examines what may be described as a transition from weak thought to a new form of strong thought in contemporary politics. Such a tendency manifests itself not only on the political right, where national, cultural, and civilizational narratives have regained prominence, but also on parts of the political left, which increasingly defend strong collective identities associated with historically marginalized groups and often draw sharp normative boundaries against opposing positions. The paper explores the philosophical and political significance of this shift and asks whether the current moment signals a movement beyond the postmodern paradigm or merely its transformation into new configurations.

Keywords: *postmodernism, weak thought, political identity, political authority, pluralism.*

Aljaž Krajnc, Ph.D., Tch. Assist.

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana

The Divine and the Sovereign: The Intertwined Origins of Deity and Kingship in the Ancient Near East

This presentation examines the vocabulary used in Ugaritic texts to describe the divine sphere. I argue that the heavenly realm, and especially the position of the high god, is conceptualized primarily through the language of kingship, court, and political authority. The gods are presented as rulers, the divine assembly as a royal court, and the high god as sovereign. This semantic overlap creates a fundamental tension. The same vocabulary that defines divine authority also defines human kingship. As a result, the language of divine sovereignty does not merely explain the gods through familiar political categories; it also opens the possibility of elevating the human king toward the divine sphere. When kingship becomes the primary model for understanding deity, the boundary between the divine ruler and the human ruler becomes unstable. The king may appear not only as the representative of the gods, but as a figure whose authority participates in, reflects, or even approaches divinity. I will therefore argue that religion and politics in the ancient Near East were not independent domains that later became connected. They developed within a shared semantic and conceptual field in which divine sovereignty and human kingship mutually defined one another. This was also the intellectual and linguistic context in which the Hebrew Bible emerged and the semantic inheritance with which its authors had to work. Biblical texts adopted this political-theological vocabulary while also negotiating its central danger: the potential divinization of the king.

Keywords: *Ugaritic religion, divine kingship, sovereignty, divine assembly, royal ideology, political theology, ancient Near East, Hebrew Bible.*

Assist. Prof. David Kraner, Ph.D.

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana

Public Speeches, Homilies, and Spiritual Reflections as Factors in Social Polarization and Cohesion

This article examines selected features of public speeches, spiritual reflections, and homilies that may contribute to either intensifying or mitigating social polarization. Particular attention is given to the construction of group identity, the emotional framing of messages, the influence of the digital media environment, and the authority of religious speakers. Drawing on a small-scale qualitative analysis of selected political, media, and religious addresses, the article compares the use of polarizing and cohesion-building rhetorical patterns. The analysis focuses primarily on “us versus them” distinctions, generalizations, the moral evaluation of opponents, and expressions of empathy, responsibility, and willingness to engage in dialogue. The findings are limited to the selected corpus and are intended primarily to illuminate relevant communicative features rather than to measure their actual effects on audiences.

Keywords: *public speech, homily, spiritual reflection, polarization, hate speech, nonviolent communication, social media, media, religious leaders.*

Prof. Nenad Malović, Ph.D.

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb

Political Religion and Human Dignity

According to Eric Voegelin, both religion and politics share a common root in human nature. Ideologies abuse this fact by responding to human religious needs with immanent content, which in itself cannot fulfill man in his religious quest. Voegelin refers to such phenomena in history as "political religion," "Gnosticism," and "substitute religion" (Ersatzreligion). It is precisely the clear differentiation between the political and religious components of humanity that can contribute to preventing the abuse of religion or religious elements by politics. Regardless of terminological ambiguities, Voegelin pointed out the mechanisms of totalitarian ideologies that threaten man and his dignity.

Keywords: *political religion, ideology, human dignity.*

Assist. Prof. Mikolaj Martinjak, Ph.D.

*Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of
Zagreb*

Saved by Code? Techno-Gnosticism and the Defence of the Human Person in *Magnifica Humanitas*

Reading the *signa temporum* of a fragmenting world, recent papal teaching has revived — and deliberately translated — the Church's oldest polemical grammar. Pope Francis named two "adulterated forms of Christianity": a neo-gnosticism that seeks salvation in subjective enlightenment and "bits of information" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 94), and a promethean neo-Pelagianism that trusts only its own powers (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 36–62) — terms used not as classical heresiology but as an interpretive key to the present. This paper argues that the contemporary AI imaginary fuses these two ancient temptations into a single soteriology: mind-uploading, algorithmic self-optimization, and digital immortality promise a salvation at once gnostic — escape from flesh through information rather than knowledge — and Pelagian — self-engineered, without gift or grace. Pope Leo XIV's *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026) confronts this fusion directly, resisting an anthropology in which persons regard themselves and one another as products. The paper reads the encyclical as a deliberate counter-gnosis: an incarnational and relational account of the person in which dignity is given rather than achieved and truth is received rather than generated. What Francis called "anthropocentric immanentism" thus reveals its political consequence — the self-closed in on itself cannot sustain a common life, and where the self is fragmented into data, the polis fragments with it.

Keywords: *techno-gnosticism; Magnifica Humanitas; Leo XIV; Pope Francis; neo-gnosticism; neo-Pelagianism; artificial intelligence.*

Assist. Prof. Mateja Pevec Rozman, Ph.D.

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana

Philosophy as Spiritual Therapy: Ancient Therapeutics of the Soul in the Light of Contemporary Existential Crisis in a Fragmenting World

Ancient philosophy, particularly philosophy during the Hellenistic-Roman period, was understood primarily as a way of life, rather than as a set of doctrines to be mastered. Socratic care of the soul, Stoic spiritual exercises, and Epicurean eudaimonism all viewed philosophy as a cure for the soul. Philosophy, on this view, was therapy in a non-clinical sense: expert guidance that helps a person discern what is essential in life from what is not, closer to existential counsel than to symptom management.

This article reconstructs this spiritual concept, drawing on Hadot's account of philosophy as a therapy for the soul and Nussbaum's interpretation of Hellenistic ethics, and asks what it still has to offer. The present era is marked by fragmentation: of attention, of belonging, and of the moral languages that once made it possible to understand suffering. Contemporary therapeutic culture focuses on symptoms and coping with them, yet it leaves aside the older question of how we should live our lives and what contributes to the flourishing of the soul. The article argues that ancient "therapy for the soul" offers a model of philosophy as existential counselling, a sustained practice for the wellbeing of the soul amid a disoriented, fragmented world.

Keywords: *philosophy, spiritual therapy, philosophy as a way of life, spiritual exercises, care of the soul, Hellenistic ethics, existential crisis, fragmentation.*

Prof. Katharina Pyschny, Ph.D.

Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Graz

Democratizing Leadership? Shared Authority and Collective Responsibility in the Pentateuch

Leadership in the Pentateuch is often portrayed as highly centralized, with Moses occupying an unparalleled position as mediator between God and Israel. Yet a closer reading reveals a more complex picture. Alongside strong individual leadership, the Pentateuch repeatedly develops strategies that distribute authority, broaden participation, and institutionalize shared responsibility. Rather than presenting leadership as the exclusive domain of a single charismatic figure, it negotiates the relationship between individual authority and collective governance.

This paper examines several key texts that exemplify these dynamics, including the appointment of judges in Exodus 18, the distribution of the divine spirit among the seventy elders in Numbers 11 and the commissioning of Joshua in Numbers 27. These passages illustrate different mechanisms through which leadership is delegated, authority is shared, and continuity is secured beyond the founding leader.

Drawing on contemporary leadership theory the paper argues that the Pentateuch reflects a sustained concern for limiting the concentration of power while strengthening communal responsibility. Although these texts should not be understood as advocating democracy in the modern political sense, they nevertheless articulate processes of democratizing leadership: authority is increasingly embedded within institutions, multiple office holders, and the covenant community itself. The Pentateuch thus offers a sophisticated reflection on the legitimacy, distribution, and continuity of leadership that remains relevant to broader discussions of governance and organizational leadership.

Keywords: *Pentateuch, leadership, shared leadership, distributed leadership, democratizing leadership, Moses, collective responsibility, authority, governance, Hebrew Bible.*

Leonnell Radinski, Ph.D.

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb

The Share of Family Households and School-Age Children in the Municipalities of Osijek-Baranja County as an Indicator of the Crisis of Subsidiarity in Croatia

This paper examines the demographic profile of Osijek-Baranja County through an analysis of the distribution and structure of family households and interprets the findings within the framework of the principle of subsidiarity. According to this principle, higher levels of governance should support, rather than replace, the functions of lower levels, particularly the family and the local community. As a fundamental principle of the social teaching of the Church, the European Union, and the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, subsidiarity promotes locally grounded solutions that safeguard human dignity, strengthen family autonomy, and foster community responsibility.

Contemporary demographic trends in Croatia are characterized by increasing population concentration in and around the capital, accompanied by a decline in large family households in the rural municipalities of Osijek-Baranja County, a decrease in the number of primary school pupils, and pronounced population ageing. These trends point to structural regional disparities and raise concerns about the long-term sustainability of local communities. Official demographic statistics further confirm a continuing population decline, which has prompted the adoption of a range of public policy measures, including the Demographic Revitalization Strategy through 2033.

Against this background, the paper evaluates the initial effects and overall effectiveness of existing demographic revitalization policies. It also draws on data from the European Values Study (EVS) 2017 to examine how residents perceive work, family, and social responsibility, and to explore value orientations that reflect the principle of subsidiarity. The adequacy of current demographic measures is assessed in relation to the actual living conditions of local residents and their attitudes toward work, family, and community life.

Finally, the paper considers the extent to which persistent out-migration constrains individuals' effective freedom to remain in their local communities and whether the weakening demographic capacity of rural municipalities undermines the implementation of subsidiarity and, consequently, the realization of the common good.

Keywords: *subsidiarity, demographic crisis, Osijek-Baranja County, family households, rural revitalization, European Values Study (EVS).*

Assoc. Prof. Tadej Stegu, Ph.D.

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana

Mental Health, Existential Vulnerability and the Kerygma in a Fragmented World

The contemporary world is marked by a growing mental health crisis intertwined with political instability, armed conflicts, forced migration, technological disruption, ecological uncertainty, and increasing social fragmentation. Although these developments are commonly analysed from psychological, medical, or socio-political perspectives, this paper argues that they also reveal a profound existential crisis. The increasing prevalence of anxiety, loneliness, loss of meaning, and identity confusion points to deeper existential questions concerning human dignity, purpose, hope, and transcendence. Drawing on the World Health Organization's World Mental Health Report (2022) and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union's Reflection Paper Mental Health in Europe: A Call for Care (2026), the paper first situates the discussion within the broader context of contemporary mental health challenges. It then engages Charles Taylor's analysis of the secular age and Semjon Frank's critique of modern idolatry to argue that the erosion of transcendent horizons contributes significantly to existential vulnerability. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy further provides an anthropological framework for understanding the human search for meaning, while Ivan Dodlek and Nenad Malović's reflection on existential anxiety and Christian hope offers a theological bridge between existential psychology and Christian anthropology. Finally, the paper proposes the kerygma as a distinctive Christian response to existential vulnerability. Rather than offering only ethical guidance or psychological consolation, the Christian proclamation presents a personal encounter with the living Christ as the foundation of hope, meaning, and integral human flourishing, which can significantly complement an interdisciplinary approach to human existential vulnerability without replacing psychological or psychiatric treatment. The paper argues that addressing existential questions should become an essential dimension of pastoral care, theological education, and interdisciplinary approaches to mental health in contemporary society.

Keywords: *mental health; existential questions; existential vulnerability; kerygma; Christian hope; meaning in life; Christian anthropology.*

Prof. Danijel Tolvajčić, Ph.D.

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb

Linguistic Community, Politics and Good Life. The Political Philosophy of Herbert McCabe, OP

This presentation aims to outline the basic features of the political philosophy of the Dominican philosopher and theologian Herbert McCabe (1926 – 2001). McCabe, who was one of the most original British Catholic thinkers of the 20th century, starts from the insight that human rationality is primarily expressed through language: man is, for him, “a linguistic animal”. Because humans are language-using animals, McCabe thinks that a good life in society involves engaging in public reason and communication. The human community is therefore a “linguistic community”. It means having a voice in the community, listening to others, and collectively determining how society should be run. In this sense, the “linguistic community” needs virtuous people. But equally, the “linguistic community” is a means by which people grow in virtue and live a communal “good life.” This is where the essence of politics lies. The “good life” requires good social institutions as well as good social practices that change the fundamental structures of human life for the better. “Good life” is therefore not a private pursuit of happiness or material success, but a deeply social and political activity rooted in a “linguistic community” in which individuals cooperate to achieve shared goals. A good life is therefore necessarily a politically active life.

Keywords: *Herbert McCabe, ethics, politics, Linguistic Community, „Good Life“.*

Prof. Dubravko Turalija, Ph.D.

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Sarajevo

Elijah's Political Success and Religious Failure as an Example of the Worthlessness of Material Social Union Without Uniform Spiritual and Moral Duties of European Society

The most fruitful prophetic time is the ancient royal Israelite time. Like no other of Israel's people, the prophets advocated the material unification of the national Israelite being into one community and kingdom, all under the morally single authority of the Yahweh cult in Jerusalem. Out of all the prophets, Elijah's time is marked by two significant characteristics: 1) He alone experienced what all the prophets desired – some kind of unification of the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel. While the Basha claimed the territory of Judah, at the same time King Asa of Judah made an alliance with the old enemy Syria against his northern brothers. This warlike state of a divided national being, which increasingly escalated into open conflict, was stopped by the time of Elijah. Then, for the first time since the schism, the two conflicting kingdoms became fraternal and even, with mutual support, were kinship-bound. 2) In contrast to the national coalition, the religious and moral schism got out of control. Although the prophet Elijah wholeheartedly advocated for the cult of Yahweh, he failed to dissuade the Northerners from religious syncretistic efforts and moral decadence. Elijah's success in social unification and the failure of a unified religious and moral duty of the Israeli people is accommodatively applicable to contemporary European Union society, in which many countries are physically uniting or striving for unification, while at the same time religiously and morally diverging, each building its own spiritual and moral environment for itself. Thus, some European countries, like the former Judah, advocate a traditional approach to religious life and moral values, while others, like the Northern Kingdom of Israel, promote a liberal and even syncretistic approach to the Christian moral view.

This article would offer a solution to Ilia's social and moral concept of global society union, in the contemporary context, correspond to Soloviev's "recipe" to accept "the essential and material unity of the human race as one being or social organism, of which different peoples represent living limbs. From this point of view, no nation can live within itself, with itself and for itself, but that the life of every nation is determined by participation in the general life of humanity. This is an idea eternally established in God's foundation. But, if it is true that a nation is a great organism, it should be obvious that it is not a purely material organism, but that the limbs and elements of which it is composed - nations and individuals - are moral beings. An essential condition, therefore, of a moral being is that the special role it has to play in general life - the idea that determines its existence in God's thought - is never imposed as a material necessity, but as a moral duty" (M. D'Herbigny, 162).

Keywords: *king, nationality, politics, prophets, religion, success, unity.*

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Religious Freedom as an Internationally Protected Human Right: Legal Challenges in the Republic of Slovenia

Religious freedom occupies a foundational place among internationally protected human rights, enshrined in instruments such as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This paper examines how these international guarantees are received, interpreted, and applied within the domestic legal order of the Republic of Slovenia, a country whose constitutional framework formally separates state and religious communities while simultaneously committing to their protection and equal treatment.

The analysis proceeds in three parts. First, it situates Slovenia's constitutional provisions on freedom of religion and conscience (Articles 7 and 41 of the Constitution) within the broader architecture of international and European human rights law, assessing the degree of convergence between domestic and international standards. Second, it identifies specific legal challenges that have arisen in practice, including the restitution of church property nationalized under the socialist regime, the legal status and registration of minority and new religious communities, questions of religious education and symbols in public institutions, and the tension between religious freedom and other constitutionally protected rights, such as non-discrimination and the secular character of the state. Third, it reviews relevant case law of the Slovenian Constitutional Court and, where applicable, decisions of the European Court of Human Rights concerning Slovenia, to evaluate how these tensions have been judicially resolved.

The paper argues that while Slovenia's legal framework largely conforms to international standards, unresolved issues reveal persistent gaps between formal legal guarantees and their practical realization.

The paper concludes with reflections on the broader implications of the Slovenian case for the relationship between international human rights law and national legal traditions in post-socialist Europe.

Keywords: *religious freedom; human rights; international law; Republic of Slovenia; church-state relations; constitutional law; European Convention on Human Rights; religious communities.*

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The Practice of Faith in the Face of Religious Fanaticism and Fundamentalism

Certain aspects of the contemporary socio-cultural and pastoral context are increasingly marked by religious fanaticism and fundamentalism. Although these are distinct phenomena, their concrete manifestations and consequences are often remarkably similar. This lecture is devoted to a theological-pastoral discernment of these phenomena with reference to several selected elements. Particular attention is given to the fact that the rejection of a scientific approach to reality constitutes one of the principal driving forces behind both fanaticism and fundamentalism. At the psychological level, emotionalized religiosity is an especially influential factor today.

As pastoral consequences of these phenomena, the lecture examines: the general rejection of the idea of progress in the religious sphere; attempts to impose absolute uniformity of practice; efforts to reduce religious life to only a few selected elements; the encouragement of sectarian behaviour; the manipulation of members within one's own group; the condemnation of those holding different views; and the promotion of violent forms of conduct. Furthermore, significant pastoral consequences include division and fragmentation within communities, criticism of the perceived lack of zeal among other believers, forms of witness reduced exclusively to particular behavioural patterns, erroneous interpretations of Sacred Scripture, attempts to rigidly preserve certain elements of religious practice, neglect of ecclesial communion, disregard for internal dialogue, and, more generally, obstacles to authentic growth and maturity in faith.

Keywords: *pastoral activity, religious fanaticism, fundamentalism, communion, progress.*

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Socio-Political Imagery for the Church in Eph 2,19-22: Citizenship and Household Metaphor

The Letter to the Ephesians demonstrates a transition from the initial prevailing Jewish worldview, adopted and shared by most of the Jewish-Christians, which divides the world in Jews and others, called Gentiles, to a new, broader and original Christian view of the world in which all who believe in Christ become one people of God. All the members of the Church, no matter their religious and political origin, who are reconciled with God through Christ are now united in one new God's nation and state in which everyone enjoys their new acquired citizenship on equal terms and with equal rights.

In Eph 2,19-22, a more positive and inclusive view of the world and the Christian community is influenced by the Greek-Roman socio-political imagery of citizenship and household membership that seeks to emphasize that all Christians are fellow citizens of a unique God's city-state and members of the same household of God (Eph 2,19). This specific socio-political imagery, in combination with the architectural building and temple imagery, offers a more positive and inclusive approach that transforms the old Jewish divisive and exclusive Jewish temple imagery into a powerful unifying ecclesial imagery in which the unity of the Church is portrayed as a participation in citizenship of God's city-state and membership in God's household. At the same time, the temple imagery itself does not disappear but it is expanded and combined with architectural and organic metaphors that portray the Church as a living organism (building) growing in Christ into a holy temple in the Lord in order to finally become what by its divine nature and origin it already is, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Although the Church can still be viewed as a new temple of God, the passage of Eph 2,19-22 offers a new perspective on the reality of the Church seen as a unified God's city-state and God's household in which there are no strangers and sojourners (resident aliens) and in which all members, all Christians, enter and reside on equal terms as fellow-citizens and equal members of God's household.

First of all, this new and fresh look on the Church through citizenship and household imagery surpasses the old Jewish socio-political and religious worldview, shared by many Jewish-Christians, that causes division and exclusion. Secondly, and more importantly, it successfully demonstrates that the Church is a unique God's creation and God's holy society in which there is unprecedented unity and equal dignity of all members in Christ.

Keywords: *The Letter to the Ephesians, the Church, socio-political imagery, citizenship, God's city-state, membership, God's household.*

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