

The Greening of Religion and Spirituality

Exploring Beliefs, Practices and Organisations in Times of Environmental Change

Conference Booklet



Image source: Colin Moldenhauer via Unsplash



UNIVERSITY
OF OSLO



UNIVERSITY OF
LUCERNE



June 15-17, 2026, University of Lucerne, Switzerland

A collaboration between the Centre for Religion, Economy and Politics, University of Lucerne,
and the Theological Faculty, University of Oslo



**Swiss National
Science Foundation**

Content

Introduction 3
Program 4
Monday, June 15 7
Tuesday, June 16 12
Wednesday, June 17 18
Participants 24
Venues, wifi, contact details & how to get around 29

Introduction

Climate change and other environmental challenges require societies to transition towards more environmentally sustainable forms of production and consumption. Scholarship has suggested that religion may be crucial for sustainability transitions.

With the majority of the world's population affiliated with a religious tradition, religion has the possibility to impact the values, beliefs and everyday practices of broad segments of the population. Moreover, religious organisations can draw on their public visibility, political influence, and material resources to facilitate change.

However, existing research is ambivalent about the (various) roles of religious beliefs, practices and organisations in sustainability transitions. For example, how do different religious organisations influence sustainability transitions in different regions and at different scales? What challenges do they face? What role does religious activism and faith-based movements play in sustainability transitions? And what influence does religious conservatism have on environmental engagement or lack thereof? Moreover, what is the role of indigenous spiritualities and/or contemporary (eco)spirituality? And is religion even relevant for sustainability transition, or is this rather wishful thinking?

The conference "The Greening of Religion and Spirituality" addresses these questions. Invited scholars present their research and discuss regional differences and contradictory findings regarding religious environmentalism. The conference also provides space for future collaborations. Furthermore, a keynote by speaker Prof. Robin Veldman will engage the wider public.

The conference is organised by the research project "What are the greening dynamics of religion." This project studies under what conditions religious organisations become more "green" (ARG2). The conference is a collaboration between the Theological Faculty at the University of Oslo and the Centre for Religion, Economy, and Politics (ZRWP) at the University of Lucerne and will be hosted at the University of Lucerne, Switzerland.

Program

Monday, June 15

Time	Content	Presenters	Moderator	Venue
12:00-13:30	Lunch (optional)			
13:30-14:30	Registration and coffee			Atrium on ground floor
14:30-14:35	Opening	Antonius Liedhegener (ZRWP)		3.B58 on 3 rd floor
14:35-14:45	Welcome and instructions	Jens Köhrsen Anastas Odermatt		3.B58
14:45-15:45	<i>Project presentation</i> What are the greening dynamics of religion?	Sileshie S. Kumlachew Maja Kofod Jensen Anastas Odermatt	Sileshie S. Kumlachew	3.B58
15:45-16:00	Refreshment break			Staff room on 3 rd floor
16:00-17:00	<i>Session 1</i> Leadership within sustainability transitions	Ayşe Almıla Akca Marita Furehaug Jeremy Kitwell	Maja Kofod Jensen	3.B58
17:00-18:15	Break			
18:15-19:15	<i>Public keynote lecture</i> False Prophets and Climate Cults	Robin Veldman	Jens Köhrsen	HS 7 on ground floor
19:15-21:00	Apéro riche (≈ dinner)			Atrium

Tuesday, June 16

Time	Content	Presenters	Moderator	Venue
08:45-09:00	Arrival and coffee (optional)			3.B58 / Staff room
09:00-10:00	<i>Session 2</i> Sacred spaces and greening	Ana Mariella Bacigalupo Philipp Oehlmann Trine Brox	Sileshie S. Kumlachew	3.B58
10:00-10:20	Coffee break			Atrium
10:20-11:40	Practitioner session	Milena Hartmann Abduselam Halilovic André Galli Reto Locher	Maja Kofod Jensen	3.B58
11:40-13:30	Lunch			Mensa on ground floor
13:30-14:30	Future collaboration and announcement session		Anastas Odermatt	3.B58
14:30-14:45	Short break			
14:45-16:45	City tour (optional)			Starting in front of main door University of Lucerne
17:00-18:00	Boat tour (optional)			Pier 3 in front of KKL and University of Lucerne
19:00	Dinner			Karl's Kraut

Wednesday, June 17

Time	Content	Presenters	Moderator	Venue
08:45-09:00	Arrival and coffee (optional)			3.B58 / Staff room
09:00-10:00	<i>Session 3</i> Continuity and change in religious environmental frameworks	Julius Malin Katinka Schyberg George C. Nche	Sileshie S. Kumlachew	3.B58
10:00-10:20	Coffee break			Atrium
10:20-11:20	<i>Session 4</i> (Re)constructing sustainability and eco-spirituality	Irene Becci Sarah van Rijn Timothy Stacey	Anastas Odermatt	3.B58
11:20-11:35	Refreshment break			3.B58 / Staff room
11:35-12:30	Closing discussion and future research	Jens Köhrsen Maja Kofod Jensen	Anastas Odermatt	3.B58
12:30	Lunch (brown bag)			-

Monday, June 15

Project presentation: “What are the greening dynamic of religion?”

Venue: 3.B58

Time: 14:45-15:45

Presenters: Sileshie S. Kumlachew, Anastas Odermatt, Maja Kofod Jensen

This project presentation discusses the results of our research about the greening of religion in Switzerland. “Greening of religion” refers to a process in which religions become more environmentally-friendly in their worldviews, values, and actions. Often this is imagined as a top-down process, where statements by religious leaders of religious organization are translated into changes at the levels of congregations and individual members. Yet, the greening dynamics may not necessarily follow such a top-down movement, and each level of religious organizations, the macro-level of umbrella organizations, the meso-level of congregations and the micro-level of individual members, may generate their own “greening dynamics”. Therefore, we have undertaken a multilevel study of religious organizations in Switzerland to answer the research questions: What conditions facilitate the greening at each level of religious organisations? And: To what extent do the conditions for the greening at the three levels correspond to each other?

We draw on both qualitative and quantitative data collected in Switzerland from 2020 to 2025. The data sources are qualitative interviews conducted with 21 congregations and 24 umbrella organizations, a quantitative survey of 1395 congregations, and a quantitative survey of 1012 individual members in 41 congregations. The religious organizations studied are the Reformed and Catholic Churches, as well as various Evangelical Free Churches and Muslim organizations. Greening is conceptualized as a three-dimensional phenomenon comprising 1) “materialization” of environmental sustainability in religious organizations, 2) “value dissemination” of pro-environmental values, attitudes and behaviours, and 3) “campaigning” for pro-environmental policies.

At the micro-level of members, we find that environmental concern, perceived social expectations, and behavioral efficacy influence members’ greening activities. Interestingly, congregational greening activities do not impact members’ greening directly. At the meso-level of congregations, we find that the socio-political composition of the member base, organizational capital and a perceived societal expectation influence greening activities in the congregation. Congregations that understand themselves as holding a public role tend to align more with societal trends than congregations which do not perceive themselves as public institutions. At the macro-level of umbrella organizations, we find that a perceived demand from congregations as well as organizational capital influences the greening activities of umbrella organizations. On the other hand, the socio-political and theological variance and the structural autonomy of the congregations is a barrier to umbrella organizations’ greening.

We present the results and discuss the implications of them for future studies of the greening of religion.

Venue: Room 3.B58

Time: 16:00-17:00

Presenters: Ayşe Almila Akca, Marita Furehaug, Jeremy Kitwell

Moderator: Maja Kofod Jensen

Practicing the Social-Ecological Agenda: Religious Leadership in Muslim Contexts in Germany

Ayşe Almila Akca

Drawing on newly generated empirical data from semi-structured interviews with religious leaders from Muslim communities in Germany, this paper presents findings from an ongoing study examining why, how, and under which conditions religious leaders pursue social-ecological agendas. Adopting an inductive approach, the paper reconstructs these actors' roles, responsibilities, and competencies in response to socio-environmental challenges and community expectations. Using social-ecological leadership as an analytical framework, it develops a heuristic concept of social-ecological religious leadership that moves beyond classical notions of guidance, spiritual edification, and ritual performance, situating leadership instead within broader processes of social-ecological transformation, particularly in relation to inclusive forms of community-building, enabling commparticipation, sustainable development, and community healing. It further analyses how social-ecological concerns reshape established models of leadership.

The analysis also accounts for the plurality of Muslim community formations in Central Europe, diverse interpretative frameworks, and the varied performances of lived religious practice, while emphasizing the centrality of community for leadership, participation, and meaning-making. By integrating empirical insights with conceptual reflection, the paper demonstrates that shaping engagement with social-ecological agendas enables actors to develop contextually grounded responses, thereby contributing to the transformation of religious leadership.

Between Greening and Greenwashing: State Power, the Politics of Trees, and Muslim Environmentalism in Egypt

Marita L. Furehaug

For this presentation, the greening dynamics of religion is seen alongside the greening dynamics of the Egyptian authoritarian state. By drawing on the United Nations climate change conference (COP27) held in Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022 as a case to explore some of these dynamics, in addition to drawing on empirical examples from fieldwork in Egypt, I plan to explore further the challenges of civil society actors and the limitations of climate activism within the Egyptian state. It explores elements of the Islamic faith tradition among Egyptian environmental actors, and its entanglements with political and social dimensions within the Egyptian context. As part of the ongoing PhD research, I conducted fieldwork during 2023, predominantly in Cairo, by employing the methods of participant observation in various events organized by environmental civil society initiatives, NGOs, and social enterprises and conducted semi-structured interviews with 17 individuals. The preliminary thesis title is: "Muslim Environmentalisms in Egypt: A Web of More-Than-Human Encounters and Entanglements" and engages

more-than-human and multispecies theoretical approaches alongside Islamic environmental thought. The analytical chapters delve into human entanglements with insects, trees, stray dogs and cats, and waste, with an emphasis on the religious, social, and political dimensions of these relations.

COP27 naturally emerged as a major theme across many interviews. According to my interlocutors, the momentum it created in Egyptian media facilitated increased attention to environmental issues and climate change that had not been as apparent before. Consequently, increasing conversations regarding environmental issues were raised also within many segments of the Egyptian population. The momentum itself and the leverage and activities it facilitated for the various civil organizations were described as invigorating. This international event was also an instigator of Egypt's Dar al-Ifta's seventh international conference entitled "Fatwa and Sustainable Development Goals" that took place in October 2022. Dar al-Ifta is a governmental non-profit organization and is one of the first pioneering

foundations to issue fatwas (religious verdicts) throughout the Islamic world. The conference resulted in the first climate-related fatwa issued in Egypt prohibiting environmentally harmful practices. Scholars and Muftis from 90 countries attended the religious event, along with representatives of the United Nations and the World Health Organization. The prestigious Islamic institution of Al-Azhar University in Egypt has also adopted the UN's vision of protecting the environment.

However, COP27 carries ambivalence for several reasons. Internationally, the simultaneous protests for the release of political prisoner Alaa Abd El-Fattah, who stopped drinking water after more than six months of hunger strike instilled a chilling dark shadow in the weeks leading up to the event. The campaign to "Free Alaa", initiated by Alaa's family, simultaneously shed light on Egypt's political prisoners who at the time was reportedly exciding 65 000, an educated guess at best as there are no decisive numbers documenting this (Dooley, 2023). There were many concerns raised, particularly, that the COP27 event essentially was greenwashing an authoritarian police state and that it gave the host government a chance to "preen green before the world" (Klein 2022). In an article by Canadian author and social activist Naomi Klein stated that: "This summit is going far beyond greenwashing a polluting state – it's greenwashing a police state" (Klein 2022). Although there are many aspects that can be pointed out, one crucial element of a "green" portrayal that I highlight here, is trees. In a rather odd story shared by one of my interlocutors that participated in COP27 and who had also visited Sharm El-Sheik one month prior to the event, it becomes clear that the organizers had uprooted several trees from surrounding villages and brought them to Sharm El-Sheik to plant around the conference area. Trees thus emerge with symbolic value for the oppressive regime staging their narrative as a green nation and deeming trees as an essential factor in telling that story. This story, along with all the tree planting initiatives I participated in during fieldwork and the religious narrations that connects this practice to Islamic ethical, theological and eschatological notions led to exploring the topic of trees within the Egyptian contexts further.

In fact, leading up to the COP27 summit, the Egyptian government introduced the 100 million Trees Initiative, an ambitious plan meant to enhance air quality in Greater Cairo and counterbalance nationwide carbon emissions (Shaban 2022). According to the Egyptian State Information Service website, the initiative aims at "doubling the per capita share of green spaces throughout the Republic, improving air quality, reducing greenhouse gases, achieving the maximum economic benefit from trees and improving the general health of citizens" ("100 million Trees Initiative," State Information Service 2022). The State Information Service has published a few updates on the initiative in 2023 and 2024, and the official narrative is that millions of trees are being planted across different governorates (State Information Service 2023; 2024).

While these accounts sound promising, they don't really reflect the general experience of the Cairene population, as several independent media outlets have pinpointed a massive removal of trees and green

spaces in Cairo because of urban development and the so called “megaprojects” that have come to be affiliated with Sisi’s grandiose plans for Egypt. These plans and the execution of them show the ways trees are interlinked with issues of politics, economy, social class, and health, in addition to climate change and environmental issues. While it can be easy to disregard trees in the oppressive political landscape of Egypt, the social media trails of thousands of Egyptians documenting the oppression of trees across multiple neighborhoods in Cairo demonstrate not only the importance of trees for residents, but they attest to human-tree entanglements in urban spaces that have the ability to branch out into diverse perspectives.

Uncovering hidden environmental activists in liminal religion

Jeremy H. Kidwell

The Pew Research Centre has been running studies of international religious demographics for several decades now. Their most recent omnibus study of data from 2010 to 2020 indicates that globally, about 77% of the world's population is religious. If one were to look at these Pew statistics on religious belonging and try to develop an efficient strategy for engaging religions in the context of sustainability policy, one might think that the most efficient approach would be to develop a strategy for the largest groups with the most straight-forward identity, e.g. Christians and Muslims, setting aside the confusing and ambiguous "religiously unaffiliated" and relatively tiny "other religions" category. And if one was aiming for maximum efficiency, you might simply target leaders of these global religions as a leverage point, mobilising official statements and policies to guide adherents towards a more sustainable path. This has been the approach by many think tanks and scholarly research centres working at the intersection of religion and sustainability over the past several decades.

There is no doubt that this approach has had an important impact, but the loss here isn't just a level of attention to what we might think of as marginal groups (and I would not want to underestimate the impact of this loss all by itself). What we are missing are some quite important leverage points for influence and engagement, within even these major religious traditions on the bracketing of the liminal edges of those traditions, which in some cases are surprisingly populous. The impact isn't just the number of people and the types of minority religious traditions that exist on the margins of global engagement, but also the forms of work that are being formulated there. These liminal edges of religious communities and identities are also a crucial space for experimentation and policy innovation and serve as a crucible where future leaders are tested and sharpened. In this presentation, which will start with a rapid sequence of charts - I will share my analysis of the ISSP survey programme data in seeking to establish the footprint of global religious liminality (focusing specifically on Christians and Muslims), and then go on to highlight the relationship between liminal religious identities in the ISSP and environmentalist identities / values. I'll conclude with some of my work highlighting and taxonomizing the content of liminal religion which is intended to catalyse engagement with new policy actors and enable a better recognition of the spaces where religion engages with sustainability.

This presentation forms the first chapter of a much longer monograph on Religion in Sustainability Transitions which I start off by formalising this category of liminal religion for environmental policy. In subsequent chapters I take up and expand on Catherine Albanese's attempt to pluralise the concept of nature religion, and introduce new ways of thinking about religion as a phenomena that grapples with placemaking, scalar politics and time (via a new account of religion as “time reckoning”).

Venue: Room HS 7 on ground floor

Time: 18:15 - 19:15, afterwards apéro riche

Presenter: Robin Veldman

Moderator: Jens Köhrsen

False Prophets and Climate Cults: How Climate Change Becomes Religiously Meaningful to Grassroots Conservatives in the US

Robin Veldman

In 2008, Barack Obama successfully campaigned for the US presidency on a platform that included the introduction of national-level climate change legislation. By 2025, the head of the US government's top environmental agency was celebrating "driving a dagger straight into the heart of the climate change religion."

To understand this reversal, and religion's role in it, requires exploring how US conservative media has shaped Americans' religious sensibilities, and how these sensibilities have increasingly been deployed against climate change. In this public keynote lecture, Robin Veldman moves beyond the climate literature's "media effects paradigm," which understands conservative media in essentially propagandistic terms. She explores how conservative media is made meaningful in the lives of conservative activists in the US, drawing on extensive field research in the US-states of Texas and Michigan.

In the keynote, Veldman argues that conservative media should be understood not simply as a natural counterpart to "liberal media", but as an arm of the conservative movement. She goes on to show how grassroots activists interpret the religious messages and affective modes of conservative media as authentic and meaningful. This helps to explain their mobilizing power. Finally, she calls upon scholars of religion and the environment to pay attention to religiosity that transcends traditional conceptions of religion, not only on the pro-environmental side (i.e., nature spiritualities, dark green religion), but on the anti-environmental or sceptical side as well.

Tuesday, June 16

Session 2: Sacred spaces and greening

Tuesday, June 16

Venue: Room 3.B58

Time: 09:00-10:00

Presenters: Ana Mariella Bacigalupo, Philipp Oehlmann, Trine Brox

Moderator: Sileshe S. Kumlachew

When Landscapes Speak: Climate Change and Multispecies Ethics in Northern Peru

Ana Mariella Bacigalupo

Concerns about climate change, the Anthropocene, and the end of humanity have brought ecological and ethical crises to the forefront of religious studies. One of the greatest challenges of our current climate crises is overcoming our anthropocentrism, our sole focus on human welfare and justice between humans at the expense of the planet. Despite the vast attention granted to the agency of sentient landscapes who challenge the dichotomy of subject and object, and the sovereignty of culture over nature, few scholars consider how a radically anthropocentric understanding of the world may help to rewrite the global climate change debate. This is the goal of my paper.

Drawing on my collaborative ethnographic research (2014-2026) with indigenous communities in Northern Peru, I analyze how sentient landscapes in Northern Peru have material and spiritual agency, respond to and impact environmental and climate crises, and shape climate change discourses and environmental futures. By drawing on an Indigenous decolonizing framework, I show how shamanic engagements with sentient landscapes can restore a sense of belonging to the earth to meet the challenge of predatory capitalism and catastrophic climate crises. I show how sentient landscapes become moral agents who guide communities through climate and environmental disaster by becoming a driving force for multispecies relational ethics in the context of environmental collapse. Here, mountains with agency, lagoons and the shamans who channel them share in the consciousness of animals, plants, and stones and respond to their surroundings from the perspective of multiple beings. Landscapes require all beings in this network to participate in interdependent relations of mutual care involving feeding and being fed centered on stabilizing ecological systems. I show how Northern Peruvian engage the current environmental crises through the material and discursive frame of mountains, decolonizing the way we conceptualize justice and promoting collective ethics and environmental justice in multispecies relational terms.

I analyze the relationship between the methodologies and frameworks of climate science, indigenous biometrics, mountains, and shamanic non-anthropocentric post-apocalyptic visions. Inspired by their visions, shamans promote awareness of the inevitable end of the space-time of modern industrial civilization and humanity—and that a world ruled by mountains will continue to exist without us. Shamans reason that when we accept that humanity will ultimately be destroyed by climate-change events, we will be inspired to respond to the environmental and climate crises to mitigate our suffering. Shamans argue that we will postpone the end of humanity by engaging with landscapes with agency; restoring ethical, reciprocal, multispecies relationships; and reimagining our existence as nonhumans in a post-human world. I show how these narratives can also help us see how the coming together of human and nonhuman values and temporal scales trigger our ethical responsibility toward the earth and its beings. I argue that these apocalyptic visions also tell a global story and offer new possibilities for collective ethical engagement with the earth and our futures. By fundamentally decentering

humans' place in the world and in the future, sentient landscapes critique offers a productive tool to promote environmental and climate justice now.

Sacred Sustainability? Southern African Perspectives on African Traditional Religion and Environmental Protection

Philipp Öhlmann

The ecological and climate crisis is one of the most pressing challenges of our times. One might even argue that it is the single most important crisis humanity is facing, due to its severe repercussions on the very basis of life on the planet. The effects of climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and the degradation of the environment are increasingly jeopardizing people's livelihoods across the globe. Rising seawater and extreme weather phenomena such as severe heat waves, prolonged periods of drought, heavy storms, and increased flooding make people all over the world feel that the world is increasingly moving out of balance. Within the global processes of climate change, Southern Africa is among those regions of the world that are disproportionately affected, with temperatures rising significantly more than global average temperature increases and extreme weather events becoming more frequent. It is clear that the ecological and climate crisis requires urgent action if the habitability of the planet in the future is to be ensured; a "Great Transformation towards sustainability" is necessary, as the seminal 2011 study of the German Advisory Council on Global Change argues. A comprehensive socio-ecological transformation towards a sustainable society, on the one hand, has to be based on adequate policy frameworks and scientific knowledge. On the other hand, this transformation is conditional on fundamental shifts in values and ethics.

Indeed, Lynn White has famously pointed to the historic ideological contribution of the Christian faith to the ecological crisis. Ecological anthropologist Leslie Sponsel even goes so far to suggest that, at its core, "the environmental crisis as a whole is a spiritual and moral crisis and that it can only be resolved by radical transformations in the ways in which industrial capitalist and consumerist societies, in particular, relate to nature". This resonates with what is perhaps the most prominent religious statement on ecological sustainability, Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, which considers "the present ecological crisis [to be] one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity". Religion can be argued to play an important role in the transition towards more sustainable societies due to what sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt has described as its transformative potential, that is, the "capacity to legitimise, in religious or ideological terms, the development of new motivations, activities, and institutions". Religious worldviews, ethics, values, and theologies can contribute to shaping social norms and individual attitudes in ways that are conducive to sustainability, be it, for instance, through advocating for and accepting more sustainable public policies or by changing individual behaviour towards more environmentally-friendly patterns. However, religion can also promote such attitudes, values, and norms that reduce pro-environmental attitudes. Notwithstanding, questions of ecology, climate change, and creation care have become important points of engagement both in theology and religious practice across many religious traditions. Examples range from the papal encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* to the Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change.

There is a lively debate in the literature on whether one can actually speak of a "greening of religion," as coined by one of the leading scholars of religion and nature, Bron Taylor. The current research seems not to support the hypothesis that religious traditions are becoming green, in the sense of a fundamental change in the context of which "they are transforming . . . in more environmentally friendly directions" (Taylor 2011) or that religious traditions have entered an "ecological phase" (Tucker 2003). However, a pronounced "ecological turn" (Öhlmann and Swart 2022) is certainly visible in many religious

traditions across the globe. While it might be that “cross-cultural evidence suggests a largely positive effect of religion on environmental values” (Preston and Baimel 2021), it remains unclear to what extent this finds its expression in increased environmental activism by religious communities and their adherents: “empirical evidence does not support the assumed ‘greening’ of religions and the religious practices and worldviews continue to harm the environment” (Koehrsen, Blanc, and Huber 2022). Against the background of these debates, research and environmental policy have turned to the potential of religious communities for ecological sustainability and climate action.

This paper approaches the nexus of religion and ecological sustainability with a focus on African Traditional Religion. Recent research considers indigenous religious traditions, such as African Traditional Religion, to be particularly conducive for fostering pro-environmental attitudes, values, and actions. However, scholars have also questioned this perspective. My contribution engages with these discussions and thereby aims to contribute to elucidating the potential of African Traditional Religion for ecological sustainability. After a brief look at the debate on whether indigenous religious traditions are environmentally friendly, I specifically zoom in on African Traditional Religion in the context of Southern Africa. To properly assess African Traditional Religion’s role concerning ecological sustainability, I argue, a more in-depth engagement with the notion of African Traditional Religion itself is needed. I propose a conceptual distinction between a historically constructed version of African Traditional Religion (ATR-A) and a contemporary version (ATR-B), referring to African traditional religious beliefs and practices in contemporary times. I then analyse two sacred sites in Botswana and their potential for environmental preservation and ecological sustainability as case studies: Goo-Moremi Gorge and Legaga la ga Kobokwe (Kobokwe’s Cave). It materializes that in the discussion that sacred sites alone do not necessarily contribute to fostering environmental protection. However, when paired with conservation efforts, they bear substantial potential as ecological learning sites and thereby contribute to rediscovering African traditional religious values of environmental protection.

Waste and everyday faith labour

Trine Brox

In dirty Dharamshala – a small town crawling up the Indian Himalayan foothills and home to local Gaddis, Tibetan refugees, Kashmiri traders, and migrant workers – the pressure of increasing consumption and intense tourist inflow has driven a massive waste problem. Waste runs down the mountainsides in streams of plastic wrappers, take-away cups, and foil-lined snack bags. Waste lines the streets and forests in the form of rotting, reeking, fly-infested food leftovers set out to wild and stray animals. Waste gathers where residents sweep it from homes and shops, rising in roadside mounds of castoffs and dirt. In dirty Dharamshala – a town struggling to confront persistent littering and dumping – one place stands out as exceptionally clean: the Lingkor.

The cleanest public place is the circumambulation path circling His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's residence and temple in Upper Dharamshala, which Tibetans typically call the Lingkor. The path begins on a roadside beside an informal dump where cattle graze among torn plastic and spilled household refuse, then slips into a lush forest of rhododendron and blue pine. Tibetan Buddhists tread it clockwise – reciting mantras, socialising, even exercising – completing one or more rounds. The path winds past a retirement home to the left and, to the right, temple grounds with stūpas, shrines, smoke-offering burners, prayer wheels, and slabs cut with sacred syllables. Due to continuous investment and diligence of the Tibetan Buddhists traversing the path, their everyday practices of sweeping, tidying, and maintaining the place, complemented by the occasional cleanup campaign by some organisation, makes the Lingkor surprisingly clean.

These Tibetans call themselves "volunteers" and for many of them, "volunteering" (danglang, དང་ལྷངས་) in the sense of keeping the Lingkor tidy is not just about the practicality of creating order and cleanliness. It is also a moral and devotional act, a form of service and duty (légen, ལས་འགན་) that purify obscuration (dripjong, དཀྱིབ་སྒྲོང་) and generates merit (sönam, བསོད་ནམས་). It is a "service" to the Dalai Lama that also benefits the community and maintains the spiritual integrity of the site. They tidy and clear gravel and pebbles from the path; remove cow dung; display plastic flowers; and paint sacred syllables. They repair monsoon damages, repaint walls, refurbish steps, build fences and concrete walls; install prayer wheels, shrines, and incense burners. They clear vegetation, plant trees, bushes, and flowers and make gardens. They put up signs quoting the Dalai Lama or warning against littering; and create selfie-spots with "I ♥ the Dalai Lama" by spectacular mountain views. And these Tibetan volunteers sort waste from the valuable, throwing trash in bags to the left, while placing sacred items in the sacred landscape to the right of the path. These actions constitute the many micro-practices of everyday care along the Lingkor, making it the cleanest place in Dharamshala.

In my paper, I explore what motivates, steers, and sustains these practices. I argue that the Lingkor offers a rich case of how everyday care are sustained because they are forms of "faith labour" constituting a civic infrastructure – a distributed system powered by certain knowledge, values, beliefs, and feelings that mobilises labour, norms, and materials to care for a public space. I define faith labour as the effort and diligence a Tibetan Buddhist performs with "faith" (dépa, དད་པ་) and "conviction" (yiché, ཡིད་ཆེས་). Such faith labour can transform ordinary acts into religious practice (and ordinary things into sacred objects), even if the activity is just an everyday chore, such as sweeping the floor of a temple, clearing gravel and pebbles from a sacred forest path, erecting prayer flags, prostrating oneself in prayer before the Dalai Lama's residence, feeding birds and macaques with yesterday's leftovers, and moving prayer beads as one performs circumambulation – all of which are common activities around the Lingkor. These activities are fundamental ways of creating "merit" (sönam, བསོད་ནམས་) that is the positive outcome generated by actions regarded as virtuous or wholesome. It is tied to the concept of karma (lé, ལས་), ie. the principle of cause and effect whereby good deeds lead to favourable outcomes, while unwholesome ones yield misfortune. The lingkor thus offers an account of how religious concepts tied to everyday faith labour can enable and give form to sustainable public-space care, yielding a clean environment through continuous communal investment.

Based on interviews and walking with volunteers, lay Tibetan Buddhist practitioners and monastics, and others traversing the path, as well as (at times, participant) observation, I analyse everyday care practices as forms of faith labour. I relate the concepts central to this moral economy. They include tsangma (གཙང་མ་) that is the purity and cleanliness that exceeds hygiene to connote moral integrity. The Tibetan concept dikpa (ཐིག་པ་) that refers to the non-virtuous and evil that creates "defilement" and "misfortune" and stands as the reverse of "virtuous actions" (gewa, དགེ་བ་) such as performing circumambulations. Moral concepts of tsangma, dikpa, and gewa structure ideas of waste and cleanliness among many Tibetan interlocutors.

In dirty Dharamshala – where most public spaces are left to decay and casual littering is widespread – the Lingkor reveals how faith labour can make a path immaculate even as the town and its surrounding forest is marred by waste. The study contributes to debates on religion's role in sustainability transitions, yet, by tracing the affective, moral, and religious commitments that animate and stabilise continuous investment of everyday care in this shared public space, the paper shifts the debate from whether religion is relevant to sustainability transitions toward a study of the religiously animated micro-practices that produce low-waste, high-care public spaces. In dirty Dharamshala – where littering is widespread – the Lingkor signals that transitions may endure where faith labour routinises care.

Venue: Room 3.B58

Time: 10:20-11:40

Presenters: Milena Hartmann, Abduselam Halilovic, André Galli, Reto Locher

Moderator: Maja Kofod Jensen

Four representatives from religious and environmental organizations will take part in a panel discussion about their practical experiences working with greening of religion and spirituality. The session will begin with a short presentation of each representative and their organizations. Afterwards the conversation will focus on the challenges they face in their work and on what we can potentially learn from their experiences for understanding developments in both Switzerland and beyond.

Participants

Milena Hartmann

CEO of oeku – Churches for the Environment (oeku - Kirchen für die Umwelt)

Abduselam Halilovic

Member of the board of the Association of Islamic Organizations in Zurich (Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen Zürich, VIOZ)

André Galli

Researcher in space physics and atmospheres, president of the association «Green Fish» (Grüner Fisch) and member of the Evangelical Network for Climate, Energy and Environment (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Klima, Energie und Umwelt, AKU)

Reto Locher

Co-founder of the Foundation Nature & Economy (Stiftung Natur & Wirtschaft) and Lecturer at the ANNA GAMMA Institute for Zen and Leadership

Future collaboration and announcement session

Tuesday, June 17

Venue: Room 3.B58

Time: 13:30-14:30

Moderator: Anastas Odermatt

This session is an interactive “Future Collaborations & Announcements Session”. This format is designed to foster exchange and networking among participants in developing future collaborations related to religion, ecology, and sustainability. The session offers space for presenting and discussing new ideas, initiatives, and potential partnerships. Participants are invited to briefly introduce project ideas, planned publications, funding initiatives, networks, or other relevant announcements in short pitches. The aim is to create opportunities for future cooperation ranging from small-scale collaborations, such as joint papers or workshops, to larger interdisciplinary research projects and funding applications.

Wednesday, June 17

Session 3: Continuity and change in religious environmental frameworks

Venue: Room 3.B58

Time: 09:00-10:00

Presenters: Julius Malin, Katinka Schyberg, George C. Nche

Moderator: Sileshie S. Kumlachew

The Historical Roots of Religious Greening: Christian Farming, Cultural Landscapes, and Sustainable Foodways in the Rural United States

Julius Malin

Against the backdrop of climate change and growing interest in sustainability transitions, scholars have increasingly asked whether religion can function as a driver of environmental change. Existing research has shown that religious organisations may shape environmental values, mobilise resources, and legitimise ecological action (Haluza-DeLay, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2018). At the same time, the literature remains ambivalent on how, when, and under what conditions religion becomes “green” (Sherkat & Ellison, 2007; Taylor, 2016)

This paper contributes to the debate by arguing that some forms of apparent “greening” by religious groups are not just recent responses to environmental discourse. Rather, they are better understood as the contemporary expression of much older place-based histories of food, land use, and religious practice. Specifically, this paper conducts a collective instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) of two Christian farming organisations in the rural United States: Hungry World Farm, a Mennonite initiative in Illinois, and Bethlehem Farm, a Catholic community in West Virginia. It explores how these organisations implement environmentally sensitive food and farming practices by drawing on relationships between religion, culture, and landscape that have co-developed over hundreds of years. As part of the method, a historical analysis was conducted of both organizations’ respective religious and biocultural histories. This was supplemented by contemporary participant observations as well as semi-structured interviews with 12 members of the respective organizations’ staff. Analysis focused on how agricultural techniques, subsistence strategies, and organisational practices are shaped by long-term interactions between ecological conditions, local traditions, and religious worldviews.

The findings show that both Hungry World Farm and Bethlehem Farm engage in forms of agriculture that, today, could be described as “sustainable” or “regenerative” - including crop rotation, composting, rotational grazing and biodiversity-oriented planting (Altieri, 2018; LaSalle & Hepperly, 2014). Our historical analysis, however, demonstrates that these practices are not recent merely adoptions driven by sustainability discourse, or top-down church directives. Rather, they are deeply rooted in historical interactions between social groups, biocultural knowledge and the forces of religious marginalization impressed on the landscape.

At Hungry World Farm, present-day low-impact agriculture reflects long historical trajectories within Mennonite agrarianism, including traditions of soil stewardship, adaptive innovation, and farming under conditions of marginality. At Bethlehem Farm, sustainable foodways draw heavily on Appalachian subsistence traditions shaped by geographic isolation, reciprocal exchange, food preservation, and the cumulative influence of Indigenous, settler, and working-class regional practices. These cases therefore nuance the idea that (Western) religion has greened only recently.

At the same time, both organisations environmental engagement is still often articulated with reference to contemporary frameworks such as sustainability, regenerative agriculture, and creation care. Yet these framings rest upon much older repertoires of practice, memory, and place-based adaptation. This paper thus argues that religious environmentalism cannot always be understood as a novel shift driven by recent ecological discourse alone. In some contexts, it also reflects the reactivation, reinterpretation, or strategic reframing of historically embedded foodways and land relations.

By bringing (bio)cultural landscape theory into conversation with scholarship on religion and sustainability transitions (Sauer, 1925; Barthel et al., 2013; Geels, 2011), this paper highlights the importance of history, locality, and lived practice in shaping religious environmental engagement. More broadly, it suggests that scholars should pay closer attention to the ways religious organisations inherit and transform biocultural knowledge over time. Doing so offers a more regionally and historically nuanced account of religion's role in sustainability transitions, particularly in rural settings in the Global North.

Counting Carbon in the Church of Denmark: Infrastructural Inversions and the Disappearance of Indifferent Things

Katinka A. Schyberg

In this presentation, I attend to the effects of introducing carbon footprint calculations as an instrument for green transitioning in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark. I explore how the awareness of carbon as a dimension of all objects and activities (Bridge 2011; Whittington 2016) influences the way church actors relate to and evaluate the material things and infrastructures around them and forces them to confront the fuzzy Lutheran boundaries between matter and meaning - captured in the term "adiaphora" – that has otherwise prevailed in the Danish church (Rubow & Engdahl-Hansen 2015). I argue that even if no material objects are considered sacred in a Protestant church, efforts to reduce carbon emissions reveal that some things are, nonetheless, evaluated as being more religiously important than others. When pressed to make decisions on what to keep and what to cut, church actors must pass judgments on what materiality 'suffices' in Protestant church life (Opas and Haapalainen 2017); that is, to determine which matters really matter. Such judgment entails that activities and objects that have hitherto been considered 'adiaphora' – that is, neither necessary for nor obstructive of salvation – must now be either defended as so important that their carbon dimension fades or pushed in a category of expendable things. As such, attention to reduce carbon emissions causes a moral and material "infrastructural inversion" (Bowker and Star, 1999), bringing to the fore distinctions between materiality and immateriality that organizes Protestant convictions about what matters matter in Christianity.

"Wealthization" of nature: How prosperity theology shapes environmental attitudes among Pentecostals in Nigeria

George C. Nche

With an estimated 644 million adherents globally (Wariboko and Oliverio, 2020), and comprising 63% of the Christian population in Nigeria (Richman, 2020), Pentecostalism has the potential to lead effective faith-based environmental action globally and particularly in Nigeria. However, Pentecostals tend to show less environmental engagement, especially when compared to denominations like the Catholic

and Anglican churches (Nche, 2020; Pepper & Leonard, 2016). This makes it imperative to understand how dominant theologies of the Pentecostal movement interact with the environment and seek ways to promote effective environmental action within the movement. One of such theologies is the prosperity theology.

Studies (e.g., Golo, 2013, 2014, 2023; Stork and Öhlmann, 2021; Vukovic, 2022) have highlighted the link between prosperity gospel and environmental crisis. These studies argue that through its characteristic focus on divinely provided wealth and health (Koehrsen, 2018), prosperity and poverty alleviation (Williams 2022; Nolivos, 2012), and materialism and affluence (Golo, 2013), prosperity gospel has the potential of promoting anti-environmental attitudes and behaviours such as consumerism (Golo, 2023), self-centeredness and greed (Williams, 2022; Mashau and Kgatle, 2019). Prosperity gospel, according to Hasu (2006:680), preaches that “By virtue of becoming born-again and confessing faith the true believer has the right to health and wealth and the possibility of consumption” and even consumerism which is considered an expression of one’s faith (Bowler and Reagan, 2014; Munday, 2017). It has also been argued that prosperity gospel reinforces neo-liberal capitalism (Barker, 2007; Chesnut, 2012; Soboyejo, 2016) and echoes elements of the Protestant Ethic identified by Max Weber which encourages strong work ethic, entrepreneurship, sobriety, and wise investments among members. Some scholars (e.g., Buck, 1993; Weber, 2013) associate this ethic with the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe and its ecological consequences (see EPA 2024; Pope Francis, 2015). In fact, Golo (2023) argues with respect to Africa, that the materialist consumerist vision of Africa’s prosperity gospel undermines the ethos of communality which safeguards ecological sustainability in the continent.

However, there is currently little empirical evidence linking the prosperity theology with environmental attitudes, as most of the studies mentioned above are majorly theoretical and based on anecdotal evidence. Moreover, while these studies provide important insights into the environmental implications of prosperity theology, they focus predominantly on its promotion of consumerism and neo-capitalism as the primary explanations for its negative environmental impact. In doing so, they overlook other theological and rhetorical mechanisms through which prosperity theology may shape environmental attitudes.

The present study, therefore, examines how prosperity theology shapes environmental attitudes among Pentecostals in Nigeria. It is part of a larger ongoing project divided into two phases: the first phase involving content analysis of sermons and the second involving the thematic analysis of interviews with Pentecostal adherents. The findings presented here are part of the preliminary results from the first phase. Nine online prosperity sermons, three each, from three key Nigerian prosperity preachers (i.e., David Oyedepo [Living Faith Church Worldwide], Enoch Adeboye [Redeemed Christian Church of God], and Chris Oyakhilome [Christ Embassy]) were analysed using content analysis. The analysis revealed themes that suggest a pattern where natural events and elements are interpreted by these preachers as models of wealth creation. These themes include rain as financial fortunes and dry seasons as poverty; seeds as financial donations; pruning of trees as God’s care and blessings; wild nature as a pathway to promotion; sea level as a metaphor for tithing level; herds and flocks as symbols of prosperity; and many more. I conceptualized this pattern as “wealthization of nature” and employed it as a key framework for understanding how prosperity theology may shape environmental attitudes among Pentecostals in Nigeria. Future studies may explore the presence of this pattern in other contexts as well as how it shapes the environmental attitudes of Pentecostal adherents.

Venue: Room 3.B58

Time: 10:20-11:20

Presenters: Irene Becci, Sarah van Rijn, Timothy Stacey

Moderator: Anastas Odermatt

Disciplinary Constellations and Rhetorical Contestations around Nature in the Context of Accelerated Urbanization

Irene Becci

For sociologists studying the ecology-religion nexus (Becci 2024) space and spatiality are central concerns at different levels. The rather recent development of ecospiritual approaches to nature, often understood as dark green religion (Taylor 2010), is strongly related to an emphasizing of bodily senses in the ritual relation to the more-than-human space. Moreover, international findings converge to locate eco-spirituality most of all in urban contexts. For about two decades, it is among urban dwellers that ecological awareness seems to be the highest as well as the propensity to sacralize or enchant what is considered nature. Interestingly, this population is also the most distant from actual rural or natural (non-built) environments, while there seems to be more continuity among rural dwellers and farmers as far as their imaginary of nature is concerned. This contribution shall present a case study in French speaking Switzerland to illustrate the urban-rural discursive and practical differences in the way nature is symbolically endowed with spiritual meaning. While a certain divide between these two types of population at the political, economic and cultural level is known, no study so far has explored the differences in terms of ecospirituality. This presentation shall concentrate on new data gathered and only partly analyzed among farmers working on the territory where environmental activists from urban context regularly protest. Environmental activism functions as a site for the production of new cosmologies, in which processes of re-enchantment and critiques of extractivism converge, reshaping notions of agency, responsibility, and the place of humans within increasingly urbanized environments.

The presentation focuses on some contemporary environmental conflicts that reconfigure relationships between urbanity, nature, and religion in contexts of accelerated and extended urbanization.

Gaia and Gore – The (Missing) Role of Animal Agriculture in Eco-Spirituality

Sarah van Rijn

This paper examines the role of animals and animal agriculture within eco-spirituality, drawing on preliminary qualitative findings from interview-based case studies and participant observation in Switzerland. While scholarship increasingly highlights the possible positive contribution of religion and spirituality to environmental sustainability, this paper addresses a key blind spot: the marginal position of animals—particularly farmed animals.

Some publications argue that forms of nature spirituality foster pro-environmental attitudes by sacralizing nature and attributing intrinsic value to all living beings. Such perspectives emphasize interconnectedness and cultivate emotionally charged identification with nature, which can encourage sustainable behavior. However, their implications for human–animal relations remain underexplored. This gap is particularly significant given the environmental impact of industrial animal agriculture. The

sector is highly resource-intensive, contributes substantially to greenhouse gas emissions, and is closely linked to deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Against this backdrop, this paper asks: what role do animals and animal welfare actually play within eco-spiritual and nature-oriented worldviews? Do such perspectives encourage the reduction or avoidance of animal products?

The findings are based on interviews with individuals identifying as nature-spiritual, including contemporary shamans, witches, “earth guardians,” and unaffiliated practitioners. Across these groups, nature is consistently described as sacred, animate, and inherently valuable. Participants report practices such as ritual offerings, plant-based healing, and expressions of gratitude toward natural resources, alongside more widely recognized environmental behaviors like recycling or reducing plastic use. However, animals occupy a notably marginal and ambiguous position. While participants express a strong connection to nature, animals typically enter the conversation only when explicitly addressed. Even then, references are often limited to avoiding products from industrial farming, sourcing animal products locally, or expressing gratitude before consumption. Animals are rarely foregrounded as central ethical subjects. This marginalization is also evident in symbolic representations. Within the eco-spiritual discourse, animals tend to appear as part of a romanticized and sacralized vision of nature, primarily in the form of charismatic or aesthetically appealing species such as deer, birds, or butterflies. In contrast, agricultural animals are largely absent from both discourse and imagery. Moreover, the sacralization of nature appears selective. Some participants who identify as spiritually committed to nature—and who follow largely plant-based diets—nonetheless use animal-derived materials in ritual contexts, such as leather drums or clothes. This suggests that animals may simultaneously be regarded as sacred and treated as resources, indicating an uneven extension of moral concern across species.

This paper argues that although spirituality may function as a motivator for environmental concern, it can also function as a filter that shapes ethical attention. While it may deepen commitment to sustainability, it can also contribute to the selective inclusion of certain forms of life while marginalizing others—particularly those associated with industrial exploitation. This dynamic becomes more visible when compared with animal rights activism. Unlike eco-spiritual actors, activists explicitly focus on exposing animal suffering and promoting ethical change. Their strategies often involve graphic and emotionally confronting imagery from industrial animal agriculture, intended to make invisible harm visible. Environmental arguments may be present but typically remain secondary.

Such approaches, however, are frequently viewed critically by eco-spiritual participants, who describe activism as aggressive, confrontational, or even militant. This critique reflects a broader emphasis within many nature-spiritual frameworks on positivity, harmony, and the cultivation of positive energy. Engagement with negative imagery—such as depictions of suffering—is often seen as harmful or counterproductive. As a result, activist strategies that rely on shock or confrontation are perceived as misaligned with these values, even when their ethical claims are not rejected. This creates a tension between two modes of engagement: one that prioritizes positive, harmonious relationships with nature, and another that emphasizes the need to confront uncomfortable realities. This tension has important implications. If negative representations are avoided in order to maintain a positive orientation, then the realities of industrial animal agriculture—difficult to frame in uplifting terms—are more likely to remain unseen. Combined with the selective and romanticized framing of nature, this contributes to the marginalization of farmed animals within eco-spiritual sustainability discourses.

In conclusion, this paper does not challenge the broader claim that spirituality can support sustainability. Rather, it highlights a critical limitation: the tendency of eco-spiritual frameworks to overlook or marginalize issues related to animal agriculture and animal suffering. By identifying this gap, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between spirituality, sustainability, and ethical consideration for non-human animals.

Whose sustainability, which religion? The religion of sustainability-as-usual

Timothy Stacey

When exploring the role of religion in sustainability transitions, it is crucial that we ask not only what we understand by religion but also whose vision of sustainability we are talking about. In my work on the religious repertoires of sustainability, I have stressed that when focusing on the cultural contribution of religion, rather than focusing on particular religious groups, it can be helpful to begin with the symbols, myths, and rituals that people refer to and mobilise. Focusing on religious repertoires allows us to a) avoid reproducing lazy assumptions about what those identifying with particular traditions “believe” b) draw cross-religious comparisons c) identify the cultural enablers and inhibitors of social and ecological transformation in settings and institutions that do not identify or come across as religious in the narrow sense of the term.

Drawing on the religious repertoires approach, this paper identifies some of the hegemonic cultural forms that already shape the dominant, morally and scientifically questionable approach to sustainability. You might say that I am seeking to characterize the “religion” of sustainability-as-usual. I focus on five aspects that together constitute what I call the “belonging-lost imaginary”: 1) belonging is understood to be more authentic prior to modernity and in places left untouched by European colonialism 2) the majority must nonetheless relinquish authentic belonging because modernization is deemed indispensable for lifting people out of poverty 3) coping with the uprooting impact of modernization is made easier by “vicarious belonging”, whereby a small group act as symbolic reserves of belonging on behalf of a much bigger group 4) efforts to conserve peoples and places acting as carriers of vicarious belonging allows for the acceleration of exploitation and extraction elsewhere 5) conflicts emerge over who gets to claim authentic belonging and, with it, the right for their lifeways to be protected from the impacts of modernization.

My aim is twofold: first, to inspire researchers to ask difficult questions about whether and how the cultural forms and practices they are observing reinforce, reform, or challenge the belonging-lost imaginary; second to invite speculation as to what alternatives are out there.

Participants

sorted from A to Z based on their first name

Ana Mariella Bacigalupo

Professor of Anthropology and Environmental Studies, SUNY Buffalo, United States

Bacigalupo draws on decolonizing methodologies in her collaborative work with Indigenous communities in Latin America, particularly Mapuche communities in Chile and pan-Indigenous communities in northern Peru. Previously, she taught Indigenous earth-based religions at Harvard Divinity School and Indigenous land-based histories at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. Born in Peru and of Indigenous Quechua descent, her research focuses on shamanism, climate change, environmental and climate justice, multispecies relations, Indigenous environmentalism, relational cosmopolitics, and community resilience.

She is the author of numerous books, including *Thunder Shaman: Making History with Mapuche Spirits in Patagonia* and *Shamans of the Foye Tree: Gender, Power and Healing Among Chilean Mapuche*, as well as many articles on Indigenous religions, ecology, and social justice. Her research has been supported by institutions including the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Fulbright Foundation. More recently, her work has focused on climate change, disaster risk management, and environmental justice in Indigenous communities in Latin America.

Anastas Odermatt

Interim Professor of Study of Religions, University of Lucerne, Switzerland, and Visiting Researcher, University of Oslo, Norway

Odermatt is a sociologist of religion. He is currently Interim Professor and Head of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Lucerne, as well as a senior researcher at the Centre for Religion, Economy and Politics (ZRWP) and a visiting researcher at the University of Oslo. His research combines sociology, religious studies and quantitative social research. His particular focus is on religion and social cohesion, environmental engagement, identity formation, and power relations in contemporary societies. He has extensive experience of working with quantitative and mixed-methods approaches.

Ayşe Almıla Akca

Professor for "Islam in Social Work", Centre for Islamic Theology (CIT), University of Münster, Germany

Akca received her PhD from Freie Universität Berlin in 2018 and the 2019 Dissertation Prize of the German Association of Middle Eastern Studies (DAVO) for her ethnographic study on Islamic knowledge, tradition, and religious authority in mosques in Germany. Since 2026 she is a professor for Islam in Social Work at the University of Münster. Following a practice theory approach, her current research focuses on religious practices in the framework of Islamic Practical Theology, specifically investigating fasting and Ramadan practices, social work, and environmentalism/sustainability.

George C. Nche

Researcher at the Department of Religion Studies, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Nche obtained his PhD in Religion and Society from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 2018 and occasionally teaches Religions and Ecology in Africa at the University of Johannesburg. His research focuses on religion and ecology, particularly the relationship between religious beliefs, values, and climate change, as well as environmental sustainability and ethics. He is currently investigating how religious affiliation and church attendance shape climate change interpretations and environmental responses among churchgoers in Nigeria, with the aim of informing climate engagement strategies within Christian denominations. He also serves on the Editorial Board of *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* and is active in several scholarly associations related to the study of religion.

Irene Becci

Full professor, Institute for the social scientific study of religion, Faculty of Theology and Religious sciences, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Irene Becci studied sociology and anthropology in Lausanne and Rome and completed her doctorate at the European University Institute in Florence, with research comparing religion and prisons in East Germany and Italy. She subsequently conducted research at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale on religion and prisoner rehabilitation in post-socialist contexts.

Her research focuses on spirituality and religion in specific social contexts, including state institutions, post-socialist societies, and urban marginality, as well as qualitative research methodology. She co-directed a Swiss National Science Foundation project on religious pluralisation in Swiss prisons and is the author of *Imprisoned Religion. An Analysis of the Transformations of Religion during and after Imprisonment* (Ashgate, 2012). More recently, her work has explored the spatialisation of religion in urban contexts.

Jeremy H. Kidwell

Associate Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Kidwell's research operates at the intersection of field philosophy and comparative religious ethics, combining qualitative methods with speculative and phenomenological philosophical inquiry. His work focuses on how philosophical and ethical reflection can be grounded in lived religious and social contexts, engaging interdisciplinary approaches to theology, ethics, and contemporary cultural issues.

Jens Köhrsen

Professor of Religion and Society, University of Oslo, Norway

Koehrsen undertakes research about local sustainability transitions (e.g. urban energy transitions) and the role of religion in addressing environmental challenges. In particular, he is interested in grassroots innovations and the collaboration of different types of actors (e.g. municipal administration, civil society organizations, businesses, churches) beyond sectoral boundaries. In his research, Koehrsen employs mixed-methods approaches, combining surveys with qualitative interviews and ethnographic observation.

Julius Malin

Doctoral Researcher, Department of Social Sciences, University of Basel & Junior Research Fellow, Center for Multidisciplinary Environmental Studies in the Humanities, University of Cologne

Malin is an early career researcher working in the field of Religion and Ecology. He is currently completing a PhD project focused on grassroots Christian farming in the rural United States. He is developing a new research proposal focused on eco-anxiety among religious students in the US.

Katinka Amalie Schyberg

Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Schyberg holds a PhD from the IT University of Copenhagen, where she completed an ethnographic dissertation on environmental engagements and climate change within the Danish People's Church. Her research focuses on religion, climate change, and environmental transformation, with particular attention to how climate change is negotiated within religious institutions and practices. She works with qualitative and ethnographic methods, especially within the sociology of religion and environmental anthropology.

Maja Kofod Jensen

Doctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway.

Jensen holds an MA in religious studies and political science from Aarhus University in Denmark. Her academic interests lie within the field of religion and the environment. In her dissertation she studies the dynamics of greening within religious organizations in Switzerland as part of the research project "What are the greening dynamics of religion?".

Marita L. Furehaug

PhD Fellow at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway.

Furehaug holds an MA in Religion and Society and a BA in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies. Her doctoral research is situated within the field of Religion and Ecology, with a particular focus on Islam and ecology and Muslim environmentalism in the Egyptian context.

Philipp Öhlmann

Scientific Coordinator of the Wittenberg Center for Advanced Studies at Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany. He is furthermore Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy, Theology and Historical Studies at the University of Botswana and Research Associate at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria.

Öhlmann holds a doctoral degree in Diaconal Studies from Heidelberg University and has also been active in development-related research and practice, including earlier work with the German development agency *Brot für die Welt*. He is the founding executive editor of the journal *Religion & Development* and convener of the International Network on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development. Philipp's research focuses on religion, development and sustainability.

Robin Veldman

Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Associate Editor for the Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture, Texas A&M University, USA.

Veldman received her academic training in Religious Studies at the University of Florida. Her research focuses on religion, politics, and climate change, primarily in the United States, with particular attention to evangelical Christianity and environmental attitudes. She is the author of *The Gospel of Climate Scepticism: Why Evangelical Christians Oppose Action on Climate Change*, co-editor of *How the World's Religions are Responding to Climate Change*, and has published numerous articles and book chapters on religion and environmental issues. More recently, her work has examined the role of conservative media in shaping and coordinating religious traditions in the United States.

Sarah van Rijn

Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies, University of Bern, Switzerland.

Van Rijn's research examines the relationship between spirituality, activism, and ecological engagement through qualitative and comparative approaches. Her current project focuses on individuals identifying with nature-oriented spirituality and members of animal rights and vegan activist organizations, exploring similarities and differences in ethical motivation, knowledge production, and activist practice. Her work contributes to broader debates on spirituality, secular activism, and moral frameworks in contemporary ecological engagement.

Sileshie S. Kumlachew

Researcher, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway.

Sileshie is a researcher in the project "*What are the greening dynamics of religion?*" His work explores the intersections of religion, media, and environmental sustainability. He holds a PhD in the Sociology of Religion from the University of Agder (Norway) where he examined media representations and socio-political controversies surrounding the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. His current research focuses on how religious worldviews, discourses and practices can contribute to or hinder environmental sustainability and social development.

Timothy Stacey

Endowed Chair of Liberal Religion and Humanism, University of Humanistic Studies, Netherlands; Coordinator of the Ecology and Belonging Thematic Group, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Timothy's academic background is in the study of religion, with a particular focus on the relationship between religion, politics, and social engagement. Rather than concentrating on religious institutions per se, his work investigates how concepts and methods from the study of religion can contribute to understanding why people take political action. His current research interests include ecology, belonging, and the role of values and meaning-making in contemporary social and political life.

Trine Brox

Associate Professor at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Brox was trained in Tibetology and combines ethnographic approaches in Contemporary Buddhist Studies with research on consumption, materiality, and waste, contributing to the study of religion and the environmental humanities. Since 2021, she has served as principal investigator of the international collaborative research project WASTE (funded by the VELUX Foundation, 2021–2026), which examines the role of religion in the generation and interpretation of waste. She has conducted extensive fieldwork among Tibetan communities in China, India, and Tibet, and more recently has expanded her research to include connections between Denmark and Bhutan using collaborative and practice-oriented methods. Her publications include the monograph *Tibetan Democracy* (2016) and the co-edited volumes *Buddhism and Waste* (2022), *Buddhism and Business* (2020), and *On the Fringes of the Harmonious Society: Tibetans and Uyghurs in Socialist China* (2014).

Venues, wifi, contact details & how to get around

Venues

Conference	University of Lucerne, Frohburgstrasse 3, 6002 Lucerne
Lunch, Monday 15 th (optional, self-payd)	Mensa, University of Lucerne
Apéro riche ≈ dinner, Monday 15 th	Atrium, University of Lucerne
Lunch, Tuesday 16 th	Mensa, University of Lucerne
Dinner, Tuesday 16 th	Karls Kraut, St. Karliquai 7, 6004 Lucerne



Getting to Lucerne



Site map



Virtual tour of the building

Wifi University Building

Wifi

via eduroam or unilu-visit

Contact details

Organizing team

Anastas Odermatt (University of Lucerne)
anastas.odermatt@unilu.ch, +41412295913

Sileshie Semahagne Kumlachew (University of Oslo)
s.s.kumlachew@teologi.uio.no, +4792532655

Maja Kofod Jensen (University of Oslo)
m.k.jensen@teologi.uio.no, +47 96 83 30 65

WhatsApp group

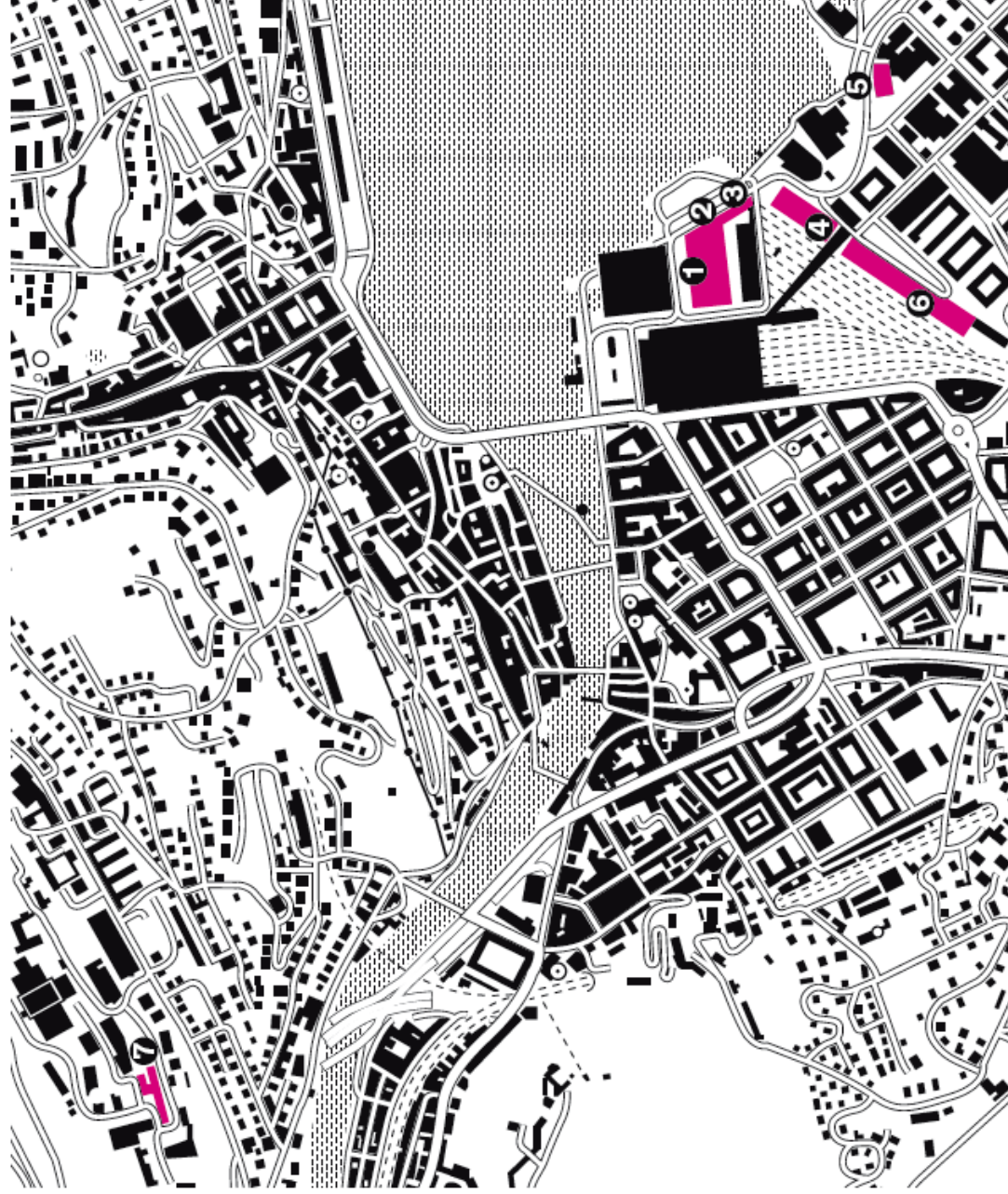
If wanted, join the WhatsApp group which will be activated during the conference to share information, papers, pictures, organize joint breakfast at the hotel, find your way back if lost, ...

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/HCY7RmRqR4eDIBOmsfylxk>



UNIVERSITY OF LUCERNE – SITE MAP

UPDATED: FEBRUARY 2026



1 FROHBURGSTRASSE 3 | MAIN BUILDING

- President's Office
- Dean's offices and professorships
- Faculty of Theology
- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Law
- Faculty of Economics and Management
- Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine
- Faculty of Behavioural Sciences and Psychology
- Institutes / Faculty departments
- Services / Student services / Chaplaincy for students "horizonte"
- Departmental student advisors
- Lecture halls, seminar rooms and laboratories
- Central and University Library (ZHB), university section
- Student organisation SOL and student councils

2 INSELIQUAI 8

- Academic staff
- Faculty of Law
- Faculty of Economics and Management

3 INSELIQUAI 10

- Management and Secretariat Further Education
- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Law
- Faculty of Economics and Management
- Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine

4 INSELIQUAI 12B

- Auditorium «Lakefront Center»

5 ALPENQUAI 4

- Dean's office and professorships
- Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine

6 WALTER-VON-MOOS-PROMENADE 4

- Management and Secretariat University Sports Campus Lucerne (HSCL)

7 LUCERNE CANTONAL HOSPITAL (LUKS) | BUILDING 10

- Seminar rooms and offices
- Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine