



SPIRE

the Global Catholic
Social Tradition Network

Catholic Social Tradition & Democracy Conference

Salzburg, Austria

June 1–4, 2025



INSTITUTE FOR
SOCIAL
CONCERNS



UNIVERSITY OF
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Conference Venue

St. Virgil, Conference Center, Archdiocese of Salzburg
Ernst Grein Str 7, 5020 Salzburg 7/ Austria
All overnight guests will be staying at St. Virgil.
All meetings will be held in the Conference Center.
<https://www.virgil.at/en/>

Description

As we face major challenges to democracies worldwide, including democratic backsliding and a new rise in authoritarian regimes, the conference explores the understanding of the value and idea of democracy in Catholic social tradition (CST). While the Catholic Church in its organizational form is not structured as a democracy, there have been important statements about democracy in Church documents and, with the idea of synodality, a new move towards participation. This Institute for Social Concerns conference will respond to the question: What can the Catholic social and intellectual tradition offer to democracy research and the practice of democracy? We will also explore democracy studies and how they challenge CST and its relation to democracy.

This conference is part of a series of conferences with the goal to build a Global Catholic Social Tradition Network ("SPIRE"). Building on Notre Dame International's global infrastructure, SPIRE systematically explores ways to apply the Church's social teaching to concrete social problems that communities face around the world. It then shares that teaching with practitioners who can implement it. The network was built on one simple but effective idea: If you want to change the world, you have to connect those who are thinking deeply about justice with institutions working for justice in communities around the world. Through SPIRE, the Institute for Social Concerns is making Notre Dame the place where the Church's social teaching becomes widely known and shared as an effective engine for social transformation in the lives of people and communities around the world.



Conference Agenda

All conference sessions will take place at the Conference Center in Conference Room 1 (1st basement floor) on Monday and Tuesday.

Please note: The Bankett Room is a separate room surrounded by glass windows directly adjoining the Dining Room.

Sunday, June 1

All day

Arrivals

6:00-8:00pm

DINNER

Attendees staying at the conference center, please gather in the **Dining Room** (ground floor) to visit the buffet and then proceed to the **Bankett Room** to enjoy dinner together. Cocktails will be in the bar after dinner for those who would like to join in.

Monday, June 2

7:30-8:45am

BREAKFAST

Attendees staying at the conference center, please gather in the **Dining Room** to visit the buffet and then proceed to the **Bankett Room** to enjoy breakfast together.

9:00-9:30am

Words of welcome and introductions

9:30-11:00am

Session I: Religious Nationalism Challenging Democracy – Reflections from Western Europe

Speaker: Ellen Van Stichel

Respondents: Vaja Vardidze and Claudia Bruehwiler

Chair: Suzanne Shanahan

11:00-11:30am

COFFEE

11:30am–12:30pm

Session II: Catholic Social Teaching as a Response to the Current “Polycrisis”

Speakers: Julie Clague and Gregoire Catta

Respondent: Mario Wintersteiger

Chair: Suzanne Mulligan

12:30–2:00pm

LUNCH

All attendees, please gather in the **Dining Room** to visit the buffet and then proceed to the **Bankett Room** to enjoy lunch together.

2:00–3:00pm

Session III: Catholic Social Teaching, Populism, and Social Trust

Speakers: Michelle Becka and Clemens Sedmak

Respondent: Amarilla Kiss

Chair: Stephan Schweighofer

3:00–4:00pm

Session IV: Democracy, Fake News, and a “Post-truth” World

Speakers: Kevin Hargaden and Evelyn Tauchnitz

Respondent: Ivo Frankenreiter

Chair: Suzanne Mulligan

4:00–4:30pm

COFFEE

4:30–5:30pm

Session V: Open Research Agenda

6:00–8:30pm

DINNER

WeiherWirt, Leopoldskroner Weiher, Salzburg

Address: König-Ludwig-Straße 2, 5020 Salzburg

Attendees staying at the conference center should gather at **6:00 pm at the reception desk** to meet ground transportation. Local attendees, please meet at the restaurant.

Cocktails will be after dinner in Salzburg for those who would like to attend.



Tuesday, June 3

8:00–9:15am

BREAKFAST

Attendees staying at the conference center, please gather in the **Dining Room** to visit the buffet and then proceed to the **Bankett Room** to enjoy breakfast together.

9:30–11:00am

Session VI: Redeeming Politics – Catholic Social Teaching as a Restorative Opportunity for Democracy

Speakers: Julia Blanc and Linda Kreuzer

Respondent: Fabio Macioce

Chair: Richard Finn, O.P.

11:00–11:30am

COFFEE

11:30am–12:30pm

Session VII: Plenary Session

In light of Session V's group conversation, what are the challenges we face in this theological and academic space right now? How can we respond? What practical steps can we take following this meeting? What areas of scholarship might we advance, and why? Are there collaborative opportunities between our institutions or between individuals at this meeting?

12:30–1:30pm

LUNCH

All attendees, please gather in the **Dining Room** to visit the buffet and then proceed to the **Bankett Room** to enjoy lunch together.

2:00pm

Departure for Obersalzberg Documentation Center / Berchtesgaden

Those who confirmed their participation, please gather **at the reception desk at 2:00 pm** to meet ground transportation.

6:30pm

CLOSING DINNER (off-site)

Following the outing to Obersalzberg Documentation Center / Berchtesgaden, the bus will transport attendees to dinner in Salzburg and back to the conference center at the end of the evening.

Organizing Team



Suzanne Mulligan

Professor of the Practice, Institute for Social Concerns
University of Notre Dame
E-mail: smulliga@nd.edu

Suzanne Mulligan has 19 years of university experience, teaching at both the Milltown Institute, Dublin, and the Pontifical University, Maynooth, Ireland, before moving to Notre Dame. She has taught extensively across a range of subjects within Catholic moral theology, but the social doctrine of the Church is her primary area of expertise. She is the former editor of the *Irish Theological Quarterly*, and is a member of the planning committee of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church. Professor Mulligan currently writes and teaches on topics such as the common good, homelessness, poverty and inequality, HIV/AIDS, and gender violence.



Clemens Sedmak

Professor of Social Ethics, Institute for Social Concerns and Keough School of Global Affairs
Director, Nanovic Institute for European Studies
University of Notre Dame
E-mail: csedmak1@nd.edu
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 001 574 302 1965

Clemens Sedmak, originally from Austria, is professor of social ethics and director of the Nanovic Institute for European Studies in the Keough School of Global Affairs, and a Faculty Fellow at the Institute for Social Concerns, University of Notre Dame. He has previously served as director of the Center for Ethics and Poverty Research and chair for epistemology and philosophy of religion at the University of Salzburg, where he was also president of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Social Ethics. His research interests include social ethics, the Catholic social tradition, and issues of poverty and justice.

Organizing Team (cont.)



Suzanne Shanahan

Leo and Arlene Hawk Executive Director, Institute for Social Concerns
Professor of the Practice
University of Notre Dame
E-mail: sshanah2@nd.edu

Suzanne Shanahan is a professor of sociology. Her research focuses on understanding the refugee experience in East Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia with special attention to how displaced persons construct moral boundaries around what is right, just, and fair. Her current research also examines the causes and consequences of domestic child sex trafficking for children and families in the United States. Suzanne leads the Virtues & Vocations Initiative—a national forum seeking to cultivate character, purpose, and meaning in pre-professional and professional education. She has a B.A. from Johns Hopkins and a Ph.D. from Stanford.

Logistics Team



Fabian Matthias Kos (On-Site Logistics Manager)

International Research Centre for Social and Ethical Questions (ifz Salzburg)
E-mail: fkos@ifz-salzburg.at
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 43 676 7035778

Fabian Kos is a research fellow at ifz Salzburg and a lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences Campus Vienna (social management) and at the University of Klagenfurt (philosophy). His main areas of work include social empirical research, business ethics, and church organizational development.



Andrea Niederfriniger (On-site Logistics Assistant)

International Research Centre for Social and Ethical Questions (ifz Salzburg)
E-mail: aniederfriniger@ifz-salzburg.at
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 0043 680 5012166

Andrea Niederfriniger has served as the ifz's press and public relations manager since June 2015. She studied Spanish and communication science at the University of Salzburg and has gained practical experiences in the media since her student days. After her studies, completed an in-depth editorial traineeship in Munich, wrote for online as well as print media, and worked in the field of cultural and event management.

Conference Attendees



Birgit Bahtić-Kunrath

Research Fellow, Political Science, Human Rights and Democratization
International Research Center for Social and Ethical Questions (ifz Salzburg)
E-mail: bbahtic@ifz-salzburg.at
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 436503604870

Birgit Bahtić-Kunrath is a political scientist and has been working for the ifz for four years. She also holds an M.A. degree in human rights and democratization. She is particularly interested in questions of democracy, especially the inclusion of marginalized groups into democratic processes.



Michelle Becka

Christian Social Ethics, Department of Catholic Theology
University of Wuerzburg
E-mail: michelle.becka@uni-wuerzburg.de
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 00491633203927

Michelle Becka studied theology in Tübingen and Cochambamba, Bolivia, and received her doctorate in Tübingen for a thesis on interculturality and recognition. Her habilitation thesis is on the subject "Ethics in the prison system." She works on fundamental questions of Christian social ethics and on questions of political ethics (human rights, migration, and increasingly questions of ecology and democracy).



Julia Blanc

Assistant Professor of Theology
Assistant Professor at the Chair of Social Ethics, Department of Catholic Theology
University of Passau, Germany
E-mail: julia.blanc@uni-passau.de
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 0033 762 27 70 11

Julia Blanc studied Catholic theology at the Universities of Augsburg, Paris, and Munich. She received her Ph.D. in 2015 at the University of Munich. Since then she has worked at the Universities of Basel and Passau and is completing her second Ph.D. in sociology.

**Claudia Franziska Brühwiler**

Professor of American Political Thought and Culture
School of Humanities and Social Science
University of St.Gallen, Switzerland
E-mail: claudiafranziska.bruehwiler@unisg.ch
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 41 79 747 96 06

Claudia Franziska Brühwiler is Professor of American political thought and culture at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, where she obtained her habilitation in American studies and a Ph.D. in political science (Dr. rer. publ.). In her research, she focuses on American conservatism.

**Grégoire Catta, S.J., STD**

Associate Professor of Theology
Department of Moral Theology and Ethics
Facultés Loyola Paris
E-mail: gregoire.catta@loyolaparis.fr
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 33783805325

Grégoire Catta is a Jesuit priest. He holds a sacred theology doctorate from Boston College's Clough School of Theology and Ministry (2015). He is the author of *Catholic Social Teaching as Theology* (Paulist Press, 2019). From 2018 to 2024 he worked for the French Conference of Bishops as the director of the office for family and social concerns.

**Julie Clague**

Lecturer in Catholic Theology
School of Critical Studies
University of Glasgow
E-mail: julie.clague@glasgow.ac.uk
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 0044 (0) 7780661227

Julie Clague studied theology in London and Cambridge. As a member of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC; www.CatholicEthics.com), Julie edits the Europe essays for the CTEWC Forum. She has served as editor of a number of journals, including *Political Theology* and *Feminist Theology*.

**Richard Finn, O.P.**

Director of the Las Casas Institute for Social Justice
Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford
E-mail: richard.finn@english.op.org
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 44 7786537538

Richard Finn is a Dominican friar, a member of the Faculty of Classics and of the Faculty of Theology and Religion in the University of Oxford. A historian of early Christianity, he has been working in recent years on English Dominican history and the work of the Dominicans in promoting Catholic social thought and practice. His latest book is *Dominicans in the British Isles and Beyond* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

**Ivo Frankenreiter**

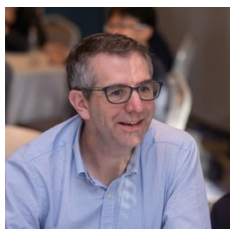
Postdoc Research and Teaching Fellow (Akad. Rat a.Z.)
Christian Social Ethics, Department of Catholic Theology
LMU Munich
E-mail: ivo.frankenreiter@lmu.de
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 49 176 70846321

Ivo Frankenreiter studied philosophy and Catholic theology in Tübingen, Paris, and Munich. His research focus lies on the interlinking between the ontological implications of worldviews, Christian theology of creation, and environmental ethics, on which in 2024 he published his dissertation "Prozessontologische Transformationsethik" (LMU Munich, summa cum laude). Since 2021 he has worked as a postdoc research and teaching fellow (Akademischer Rat a.Z.) at the chair for Christian social ethics at LMU Munich.

**Wilhelm Guggenberger**

Ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr.
Department of Systematic Theology
University of Innsbruck
E-mail: Wilhelm.Guggenberger@uibk.ac.at
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 43 676872530001

Wilhelm Guggenberger studies in Christian philosophy and Catholic theology. He earned an M.A. in theology in Innsbruck in 1991 and his Doctor of Catholic Theology in 1996. In 2006, he earned his habilitation with a theses about economic ethics. Wilhelm is an assistant professor at the Department of Systematic Theology, Innsbruck. He also guest lectures in Brixen (Italy), Athens, and several Indian Universities (Pune, Trichi, Palayiamkottai). Since 2021, he has served as the dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology.



Kevin Hargaden

Director and Social Theologian
Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, Dublin, Ireland
E-mail: khargaden@jcfj.ie
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 00353838780403

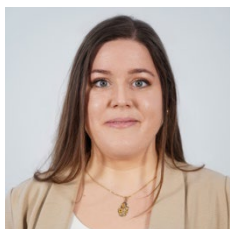
Kevin Hargaden is the director and social theologian at the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice in Dublin, Ireland. He holds degrees in computer science, sociology, and theology and completed his Ph.D. in theological ethics at the University of Aberdeen under the supervision of Brian Brock and Stanley Hauerwas. Kevin works in conjunction with his team of scientists and social scientists to reflect theologically on political and policy issues.



Mishela Ivanova

Senior Scientist
School of Education & Department of Educational Sciences
University of Salzburg;
E-mail: mishela.ivanova@sbg.ac.at
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 436507433271

Mishela Ivanova is a senior scientist at the Department of Educational Science (school-based research and school practice) at the University of Salzburg. Her research focuses on citizenship education, educational research, migration pedagogy, and teacher education and professionalism.



Amarilla Kiss

Assistant Professor of Public International Law
Institute of International Studies and Political Science
Pázmány Péter Catholic University
E-mail: amarilla.marta.kiss@gmail.com
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 36 305579601

Amarilla Kiss is an assistant professor at the Institute of International Studies and Political Science at Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest. She is a jurist holding a Ph.D. in public international law. In 2024, she was awarded the Patrick and Angela Adams Fellowship at the Nanovic Institute, University of Notre Dame.

**Linda Kreuzer**

University Assistant (PraeDoc)

Social Ethics/Department of Systematic Theology and Ethics, Faculty of Catholic Theology
University of Vienna

E-mail: linda.kreuzer@univie.ac.at

Mobile (with WhatsApp): 00436508510199

Linda Kruezer studied Catholic theology, philosophy, and education. After graduating and working in various contexts as a teacher, journalist, and trainer for political education, she returned to the university in January 2024 and works at the Institute for Social Ethics, specializing in care ethics, theories of democracy, and media ethics.

**Fabio Macioce**

Full Professor of Philosophy of Law

Department of Law, Economics, and Political Theory

LUMSA University

E-mail: f.macioce@lumsa.it

Mobile (with WhatsApp): 39 3395390749

Fabio Macioce is full professor of philosophy of law and bioethics at LUMSA University, School of Law, Rome. He held visiting positions at various universities in Europe. Since 2019, he has been working as an expert for the Council of Europe in the field of bioethics. His research interests lie in the fields of individual and group vulnerability; law, justice, and aesthetics; bioethics and informed consent; and law and religion. He is currently the principal investigator of the project "Vulnerabilities arising from human-robot collaboration in the workplace: ethical and legal perspectives" (2023–2025).

**Sophie Schubert**

Ph.D. Student

Department of Educational Science

Paris Lodron University Salzburg

E-mail: sophie.schubert@plus.ac.at

Sophie Schubert earned her master's degree in educational science at the Leopold-Franzens-University Innsbruck, where she was a project assistant in an international research project (2022–2024). Her primary research areas are fundamental questions of general educational science; historical-systematic approaches to disciplinary and institutional history; dimensions of social inequality; and research into forgetting and memory.



Stephan M. Schweighofer

Associate Researcher in Educational Science
Citizenship Education and Teacher Training, School of Education
Paris Lodron University Salzburg
E-mail: stephan.schweighofer@plus.ac.at
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 00436769182298

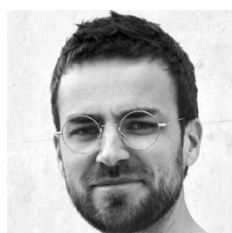
Stephan Schweighofer's research topics are democracy and citizenship education. After teaching at the University of Rome III, he is currently finishing his Ph.D. in educational science and is involved in various projects concerning European integration and teacher training. Additionally, he is teaching German at a high school in Tyrol.



Claudia Schwertl

Senior Scientist
Department of Educational Science
Paris Lodron University Salzburg
E-mail: claudia.schwertl@plus.ac.at

Claudia Schwertl has been a doctoral student at the University of Salzburg since 2021. She received her bachelor's degree in education at the University of Salzburg in 2018 and her master's degree in educational science at the University of Salzburg in 2021. Her research focus is education in the 20th century (reform pedagogy) and early childhood in Red Vienna. The topic of the dissertation is socialist educational theories and pedagogy and psychoanalysis.



Matthias Steffel

Scientific Assistant (PostDoc) in Educational Science
Paris Lodron University Salzburg
E-mail: matthias.steffel@plus.ac.at
Mobile (with WhatsApp): 43 69919094616

Matthias Steffel's primary research interests are pedagogical and anthropological dimensions of education; philosophical and historical-systematic approaches in pedagogy; and pedagogical utopia research, ideology critique, and criticism in/of pedagogy.

**Evelyn A. Tauchnitz**

Senior Researcher and Lecturer of Ethics

Institute of Social Ethics

University of Lucerne

E-mail: evelyne.tauchnitz@graduateinstitute.ch

Mobile (with WhatsApp): 41 77 921 53 83

Evelyn Tauchnitz's a distinguished expert in ethics, digital technologies and AI, peace and conflict research, governance, and democracy. She is a senior researcher and lecturer at the University of Lucerne, Switzerland, and a senior fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI). Previously, she was a research associate at the Centre for Technology of Global Affairs (CTGA), University of Oxford, UK, and a visiting fellow at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy. She possesses a Ph.D. in international relations with a specialization in political sciences from the Graduate Institute in Geneva.

**Ellen Van Stichel**

Associate Professor of Christian Political and Social Ethics

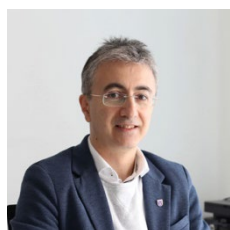
Centre of Catholic Social Thought

KU Leuven

E-mail: ellen.vanstichel@kuleuven.be

Mobile (with WhatsApp): 0032472 69 16 31

Ellen Van Stichel is associate professor of Christian social and political ethics at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the KU Leuven, Belgium. She is a member of the Research Unit Theological and Comparative Ethics, coordinator of the Centre of Catholic Social Thought, and a member of Ethics@KULeuven.

**Vaja Vardidze**

Full Professor of Theology

The Center for Social Teaching of the Church

Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University

E-mail: v.vardidze@sabauni.edu.ge

Mobile (with WhatsApp): 995 599 765146

Vaja Vardidze studied in Poland and Germany, where he received his Ph.D. He is vice-rector of the Institute of Theology, Philosophy, Culture and History; rector of Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani University; and president of KAAD-Partner committee in Georgia.

**Mario C. Wintersteiger**

Lecturer of Political Theory and the History of Ideas

Department of Political Science

Paris Lodron University of Salzburg

E-mail: mario.wintersteiger@plus.ac.at

Mobile (with WhatsApp): 43 664/2002816

Mario C. Wintersteiger completed his studies at the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg (M.A. in 2007, Ph.D. in 2011) and has since held various academic positions there. Since 2013, he has also been a regular lecturer for the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS). He served as managing editor of the *Austrian Journal of Political Science* (*ÖZP*) and was a member of the working group “Politics – Religion – Violence” of the Austrian Research Association (ÖFG).

**Adam Zadroga**

Associate Professor of Moral Theology

Department of Social Moral Theology

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland)

E-mail: zadroga@kul.pl

Mobile (with WhatsApp): 48 507 810 562

Adam Zadroga is associate professor of social moral theology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), Poland. A theologian and economist, his research focuses on Catholic social teaching, business ethics, and social entrepreneurship. He holds a doctorate in moral theology (2007) and habilitation in moral theology (2019), both from KUL, and completed doctoral studies in economics at the Warsaw School of Economics (2014). His work explores the ethical foundations of economic life and the role of moral responsibility in shaping just and participatory communities.

