

## International Conference

University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, UK

25-26 June 2026

### *The Ambivalence of the Sacred in the Age of Polarization:*

#### *From Religious Nationalism & Civilizationism to Interreligious Solidarity*

Organised by The Religion & Foreign Policy Initiative, University of Sussex, The Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion, University of Notre Dame, & co-sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, UKRI Grant APP81795) and the British Academy (Seed Fund ESF2526\260309)

## Draft Programme

### Day 1. 25 June. Gallery Room 1, Bramber House

Registration	1pm
Introduction	1.20pm
<b>Panel 1</b> - <i>The “ambivalence of the sacred” after a quarter century.</i>	1.30 - 3.30pm

**Keynote Speaker:** R. Scott Appleby (Keough-Hesburgh Professor of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame), *Beyond Ambivalence: Engaging Religious Actors for Integral Human Development.*

#### Speakers

- Paul Hedges (Nanyang Technological University) *Religious Narratives as Polarised Politics: Ethnicity, Identity, and Hate*
- Luca Mavelli (University of Kent): *The Sacralisation of Oil in an Age of Religious Nationalism*
- Richard Roberts (University of Edinburgh). *‘Trial by death’ or Being as Communion: ‘God’ in Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Theology in the context of polycrisis and the civilizational debate*
- Scott Thomas (Oxford University): *The Book of Joshua and the ‘Ambivalence of the Sacred’ in Contemporary American Politics*

Coffee break 3.30 - 4pm

**Panel 2** - *The political ambivalence of religion in times of religious nationalism and civilizationism* 4 - 6pm

**Keynote Speaker:** Jocelyne Cesari (Professor of Religion and Politics, University of Birmingham)  
*The Nation, the Sacred, and the Civilizational Turn*

**Speakers:**

- Chia-Yu Liang (National Chengchi University): *Tianxia (All-under-Heaven)? Jiagnbu (Rivers-and-Lakes)! Towards a Theory of Sacred Violence and Righteous Peace in the Chinese Tradition*
- Atsuko Ichijo (Birkbeck University): *The ambivalence of religion: Christian nationalist in Meiji Japan*
- Arshita Nandan (University of Kent): *It is a War of Good over Evil: Analysing the use of Hindu Symbols by Indian Armed Forces in Occupied Kashmir*
- Valerii Sekisov (Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary): *Sacralisation versus Routinisation of War: The Ukrainian Case*

## Day 2. 26 June. Gallery Room 1, Bramber House

**Registration** 8.30am

**Panel 3** - *The political ambivalence of religion in a post-liberal world of culture wars* 9 - 11 am

**Keynote speaker:** Adrian Pabst (Professor of Politics, University of Kent, and Deputy Director, National Institute of Economic and Social Research): *The Paradox of Peace: religion and ethical realism in an era of civilisational conflict*

**Speakers:**

- Geleta Berisso (University of Notre Dame): *Political Pentecostalism and the De-politicisation of Structural Sin in Contemporary Africa.*
- Rosita Garškaitė-Antonowicz (Vytautas Magnus University): *Catholic Nationalism in Lithuania: transforming theological positions into political arguments*
- Slavica Jakelic (Oxford University): *From culture wars to Democratic Solidarities.*
- Frederic Strack (University of Sherbrooke): *Fighting Divisions with Divisions? The Ambivalence of the Rejection of the Sacred through Laïcité in France*

Coffee Break 11- 11.30am

**Panel 4** - *The political ambivalence of religion in the context of today's growing inter-religious solidarity*

11.30 - 1.30pm

**Keynote Speaker:** Fabio Petito (Professor of Religion and International Affairs, University of Sussex): *Seeds of Hope: The unexpected significance of interreligious dialogue in contemporary international relations*

**Speakers:**

- Matthew Bagot (Spring Hill College) *Religion as Good for Democracy: The Solidarity of Catholicism and Reformist Islam regarding Universal Human Rights.*
- Ugo Gaudino (University of Sussex): *Securitising and De-Securitising in the name of God: Pope Francis against the Populist Right*
- Turan Kayaoglu (University of Colorado, Denver) Sefa Secen (Nazareth University, NY): *The Dual Power of Islamic Solidarity Discourses*
- Sara Silvestri (City St George's University of London): *Mery vs Power Politics: Catholic Church interventions in migration and refugee policy debates*

Lunch

1.30pm - 2.30pm

**Panel 5** - *Religious militants for peace and religious peacebuilding in IR*

2.30-4 pm

**Speakers**

- Cora Alder (London School of Economics), *The Modern Secular and Its Colonial Shadow: Rethinking the Secular/Religious Divide in Peace Mediation*
- Andrew Dickson (University of Sussex/University of Notre Dame), *The Ambivalence of the Secularised: Postsecular Translations in Contemporary Religious Engagement*
- Stacey Gutkowski (King's College), *Beyond Just Peace: Religious Peacebuilding in Age of Polycrisis*
- Jason Klocek (University of Nottingham), *Uncertain Faith in Uncertain Times: Re-envisioning the Role of Religion in Peace Processes*

**Concluding remarks**

4 - 4.30pm