

NORDIC NEW TESTAMENT CONFERENCE  
UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG, 12–15 JUNE 2026

# ABSTRACTS



## SPECIAL SESSIONS: PHD PROJECTS IN PROGRESS

Special session I – Saturday, 13.30–14.45

Chairs: Ellen Aasland Reinertsen, University of Oslo, and Lukas Hagel, Lund University

Veljko Birač, Stockholm School of Eastern Christian Studies and University of Eastern Finland, “The Son David Sang About: The Psalmistic Background of the Messiah Language of Early Christianity within Ancient Judaism Literary Discourse”

This study examines how early Christians interpreted Psalms in messianic discourse within the literary traditions of Ancient Judaism. Rather than viewing messianism through theological or historical lenses, the study approaches it as a linguistic phenomenon – a “messiah language” discourse that Christ-followers inherited and developed. Through textually oriented discourse analysis, combined with literary criticism and comparative methods, this research investigates how Psalms contribute to messianic discourse at the linguistic, literary, and rhetorical levels. The research questions address three methodological dimensions: (1) linguistic and literary features of Psalms in messianic contexts, (2) discourse construction and identity formation, and (3) comparative analysis between Jewish and Christian messianic uses of Psalms. This project contributes to scholarship by treating messianism primarily as a literary rather than a sociological or ideological phenomenon, and by examining Early Christian messiah language not as a separate development but as participation in a broader ancient Jewish scriptural interpretative tradition. This could help us understand early Jewish-Christian relations through shared scriptural exegesis rather than theological abstractions, showing how religions are (partly) “co-produced,” thereby inviting interreligious dialogue as a path to understanding “the self.”

Annette Hjort Knudsen, University of Copenhagen, “The Phenomenon of Power Encountered in Biblical Narratives and Historic Case Studies Illuminated by Hannah Arendt’s Reflections”

The narrative of the crucifixion found in all four gospels (Matt 27,33-44; Mark 15,22-32; Luk 23,33-43; Joh 19,17-30) is so fundamental to the Christian faith that believers and non-believers alike recognize the cross as the iconic image of the faith of Christianity. The image of the son of God, almighty God himself, suffering the impotent pain and humiliation of crucifixion is such a contradiction of terms that it has been dismissed as altogether meaningless.

The PhD project studies the phenomenon of power as it is encountered in biblical narratives. The exegetical findings will be hermeneutically informed by case studies from Christian reception history and illuminated by the phenomenological reflections and concepts found in the writings of Hannah Arendt. The biblical understanding and exegetical potentials remain, however, at the heart of the project.

Anni-Maria Peltola, University of Eastern Finland, “Biblical References in Statements Given by Church Leaders in the Context of the Russo-Ukrainian War”

My doctoral research investigates the use of biblical texts as elements of argumentation in statements made by church leaders concerning the Russo-Ukrainian war. I analyze how Patriarch Kirill, Pope Francis, and Finnish bishops utilize biblical texts to support their views on

the conflict. Additionally, I examine speeches by Metropolitan Mitrofan of Murmansk, in which he advocates for Russian sovereignty over the Varanger Peninsula and Svalbard.

To reveal the functions of these biblical references, I apply Stephen Toulmin's model of argumentation. Following this analysis, I conduct a diachronic exegetical study to assess the role of the cited texts within traditional scriptural interpretation. Finally, through intratextual argumentation analysis, I evaluate the original function of the cited passages to determine whether the church leaders' usage aligns with their intended meaning or reflects strategic reinterpretation.

Special session II – Saturday, 15.15–16.30

Chairs: Ellen Aasland Reinertsen, University of Oslo, and Lukas Hagel, Lund University

Myriam Pauline Razamanaro, VID Specialized University, "Should Nenilava remain Silent? A Malagasy Reading of 1 Corinthians 14:33b–40"

This study investigates the paradox within the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC), which at the same time celebrate and honor a female leader named Nenilava, consecrated as prophetess, and maintains the policies that prohibit women from ordination and serving in pastoral roles. Using African Biblical Hermeneutics in dialogue with Nenilava's contextual Malagasy theology, the research offers a rereading of 1 Corinthians 14:33b–40—a passage frequently invoked to silence women in church settings. By examining Nenilava's spiritual authority, leadership practices, and recognized prophetic ministry, the study demonstrates how her example provides a theologically grounded lens for reinterpreting this contested text. The findings suggest that Nenilava's life and ministry open pathways for a more contextual and inclusive understanding of women's participation in public ministry of the church. This reinterpretation challenges prevailing restrictive interpretations within the MLC and contributes to broader conversations on gender, scripture, and indigenous theological resources in African Christianity.

Tin Nwe Aye, University College Stockholm, "Seeing the Invisible in View of Stoic Knowledge in a Hellenistic Jewish Context"

Hebrews 11:27 portrays Moses as one who endured "as seeing the invisible," a notable and distinctive expression that raises questions about divine invisibility, perception, and faith. While previous scholarship has explored this phrase through Platonic, Jewish apocalyptic, and theological lenses, the potential contribution of Stoic epistemology has received limited attention. This study argues that Stoic concepts of knowledge, perception, and an ethically cultivated life provide a fruitful framework for interpreting the author's depiction of Moses's seeing the invisible divine. By situating Hebrews 11:27 within its Hellenistic Jewish context, this study examines how Stoic theories of knowledge—particularly cultivation of a virtuous life and a perception governed by reason—illuminate the text's understanding of "seeing the invisible" beyond mere visionary experience. Special attention is given to the role of Philo of Alexandria, whose integration of Stoic epistemology into biblical exegesis offers a conceptual link between Jewish tradition and Hellenistic philosophy. Employing historical-critical interpretation and philosophical analysis, the study examines Hebrews 11:23–27 together with Stoic sources and Philonic texts. It proposes that "seeing the invisible" is best understood not as a momentary experience but as a sustained and rational perception shaped by an

ethically embodied life. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing discussions of faith, perception, and philosophical engagement in Hebrews.

Victoria Vasquez, Uppsala University, "Envisioning an Honourable Death – The Death of Jesus in the Synoptics"

According to ancient Greco-Roman ideals, the manner of your death was intimately connected to your character and the way you had lived. Thus, an honourable person was expected to die honourably, and the other way around. Depictions of the noble death was commonly recounted in different types of ancient literature, and especially in biographies. Based on this it is not difficult to see that early Jesus-believers' claim about Jesus as the Messiah, combined with his shameful death on the cross, posed something of a dilemma.

The purpose of my project is to look at the Synoptics' description of Jesus's death in light of ancient ideals of a noble death, especially compared to such depictions in ancient Greco-Roman biographies, connecting the study to the larger discussion about the potential biographical genre of the Gospels. However, moving away from endless debates about "what genre", the aim is to look at the hermeneutical consequences of the genre by asking if and how Mark's early readers, Matthew and Luke, redacted Mark's passion narrative according to noble death ideals and how that fit within their overarching compositional goals.

The project thus uses redaction critical methods as well as reader-response approach. It also draws on cognitive genre theory which theorizes about how humans categorize and recognize categories such as genres, or motifs, and how it contributes to meaning-making.

Apocalypticism in the New Testament

Chair: Lotta Valve, University of Eastern Finland

Helge Ask, VID Specialized University, “Jude and the Rebellious Angels: A Case of Lex Talionis?”

A curious feature of the Letter of Jude is the references to rebellious angels (vv. 6, 13). The verb τηρεω (“keep”) plays an important part in these references, and, in v. 6, it is used to describe both their illicit behaviour and the punishment they receive for it. In previous research, it has occasionally been suggested that this double-sided use of the verb is a reflection of the judicial principle of lex talionis, i.e., that an offender should receive a punishment proportionate and related to the offense. In this paper, I continue this discussion and undertake a thorough analysis of the case in light of how lex talionis was understood and utilised in the context of Jude. On the basis of this analysis, I explore further how lex talionis can help understand the references to rebellious angels in Jude in light of the text’s imperial context(s).

Cato Gulaker, Ansgar University College, “Bound to Comply: Exploring the Autonomy of the Devil in Revelation 20”

This paper forms part of a larger project investigating the degree of autonomy attributed to the Devil in the Book of Revelation through literary and intertextual analysis. Focusing on Rev 20:1–10, it examines the intertextual background of the passage in order to elucidate the otherwise terse characterization of the Devil (or Satan) in Revelation and to explore how this figure is configured in relation to divine agency.

Particular attention is given to the reference to “Gog and Magog” in Rev 20:8 (cf. Ezek 38–39), which serves as an instance of what Jeanine K. Brown has termed storied metalepsis. In Rev 20, the Devil’s binding and incarceration signal a reluctance to comply with his deceptive role, while the intertextual evocation of Ezek 38–39 reframes this same impulse as instrumentally deployed within a divine economy. This tension complicates traditional readings of the Devil in Revelation that operate primarily within a cosmic-conflict paradigm—a framework that stands in marked contrast to the more domesticated, instrumentalized malignant agents attested in earlier Hebrew Bible traditions.

Given Revelation’s close literary and theological affinity with these traditions, this paper proposes a reading of the Devil’s character that holds together both his instrumental, domesticated function and his increasingly individualized malignant agency. Such a reading, grounded in the intertextual echoes embedded within the apocalyptic hypertext, offers a nuanced account of the Devil’s constrained autonomy in Rev 20.

Tobias Hägerland, University of Gothenburg, “Regeneration and Inheritance: An Apocalyptic Saying De-apocalypticized (Titus 3:5–7)”

This paper explores the relationship between Matthew 19:28–30 and Titus 3:5–7, with particular attention to the transformation of apocalyptic language in a second-century context. The study focuses on the rare term παλιγγενεσία, which occurs only in these two passages in the New Testament. My analysis further highlights the unusual proximity of

κληρονόμος / κληρονομεῖν and ζωὴ αἰώνιος in both passages, a combination that is otherwise infrequent in the New Testament.

As it appears, the author of Titus was likely familiar with, and made use of, the Gospel of Matthew, a proposal supported by additional thematic and lexical parallels between the epistle and the Gospel. I will suggest that Titus 3:5–7 echoes Matt 19:28–30. In Matthew, the reference to regeneration and inheritance is firmly embedded in an apocalyptic and eschatological framework, referring to the renewal of the cosmos and the restoration of the twelve tribes at the enthronement of the Son of Man. In Titus, by contrast, the term is recontextualized within a soteriological and pneumatological discourse, closely associated with salvation, justification, and renewal through the Holy Spirit.

I will argue that this reconfiguration of an apocalyptic saying exemplifies a broader de-Judaizing tendency in the Epistle to Titus and consider whether this shift reflects an emerging mode of Christian self-identification in conscious distinction from Jewish apocalyptic expectations.

#### Greco-Roman Society and Literature and the New Testament

Chair: Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson, University of Münster

Thomas Christensen, MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, “Paul as a Figure of Cultural Memory in Acts: Negotiating Christian Identity within Greco-Roman Values”

This paper argues that Acts constructs Paul as a memory figure through whom Luke negotiates early “Christian” identity within the Greco-Roman world. It explores how Luke presents Paul as a Torah-faithful Jew, an educated participant in Hellenistic culture, and an exemplary civis Romanus, to model what it means to be Christian in culturally legible ways.

First, Paul is anchored in Israel’s venerable antiquity through his Torah-faithfulness and devotion to ancestral custom. Second, he is depicted as embodying Greek ideals of paideia and sophistic eloquence as cultivated in the Second Sophistic. Third, he is legitimized within Roman civic and juridical norms as a restrained and rational civis Romanus, repeatedly vindicated against common cultural fears and suspicions. Luke gives Paul’s memory a shape that makes him legible across three cultural registers. I argue that Luke constructs him as a memory figure in which the best of Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultural worlds is integrated into an inhabitable pattern of Christian identity within Greco-Roman evaluative frameworks.

By foregrounding Paul as a memory figure through whom dominant cultural values are appropriated and recalibrated, Luke articulates a pattern of identity that is continuous with Israel, culturally plausible within Greek norms, and publicly legitimate within the Roman world. Paul becomes the form in which the Jesus movement learns how to be “Christian” in its new situation, rendering an “Israel-in-Empire” existence both conceivable and inhabitable.

Sara Didriksen, Aarhus University, “The Father, The Son and Homer”

In this paper, I will investigate how Jesus is portrayed through direct speech in the late antique epic of the first redaction of the Homero-centones focusing on two scenes, one known from the canonical gospels and one that isn’t. This cento-text is written in the middle of the fifth century and exclusively uses quotations from Homer to retell the New Testament with some

additional scenes. The two scenes I will present are a dialogue between God and Jesus before incarnation and the wedding in Kana.

In this literary text, the two traditions, the antique and Christian, come together to create a new narrative, drawing on both and mixing them to situate the narrative strongly within the theo-logical debates of its contemporary society. Therefore, this paper aims to demonstrate how the two traditions influence and negotiate each other's values. To illuminate the multifaceted reception of the cento, I will use the two scenes to demonstrate how Jesus talks and is talked to in different contexts which opens a narratological analysis of speech as characterization tool. I will relate the first scene to the Assembly of Gods known from the antique epics and analyze the relationship between Jesus and God. The second scene will then present an interesting parallel as we here get a picture of Jesus interacting with Mary and can analyze how she is portrayed in relation to him but also in her own right, and further, how the two scenes inform a reading where the contemporary debates are visible and commented on through the use and change of the Homeric and Christian tradition

With this paper, I aim to present my research to New Testament Scholars and students of cultural encounters between Christianity and Antiquity. I will show how these diverging cultures influence each other and merge to create a shared heritage, one that in this instance produces a narrative richly shaped by both Homeric and Christian reception that inform each other and guide the reader in interesting ways.

#### Veli-Pekka Haarala, University of Helsinki, "From Workshop to Ekklesia: Urban Space and the Material Conditions of Early Christian Gathering"

This paper introduces an urban and material perspective on early Christian gathering practices in the Roman world by focusing on the spatial settings in which such assemblies are likely to have taken place. Rather than treating early Christian meetings primarily through later ecclesial models or the generalized category of the "house church," the paper approaches them as activities embedded in the everyday environments of Graeco-Roman cities, especially at street level.

The paper explores how combined domestic and work spaces (οἶκος-ἐργαστήριον) – a common feature of Roman urban life – functioned as semi-public environments characterized by permeability, visibility, and constant interaction with the surrounding street. Drawing on scholarship on Roman street culture and urban social life, it examines how such spaces blurred conventional distinctions between public and private, work and domesticity, and how these blurred boundaries formed the material conditions under which early Christian gatherings could occur.

By situating New Testament references to early Christian assemblies within this broader urban and cultural context, the paper highlights the extent to which early Christian communal practices were shaped by, and responsive to, the rhythms, constraints, and social dynamics of Graeco-Roman city life. The aim is not to advance a single explanatory model, but to offer a spatially informed framework for thinking about early Christian gathering as an ordinary, visible, and negotiated practice within the urban fabric of the Roman world.

Ingunn Aadland, MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, “Shaping the Bible: Scripture in Liturgy”

Christian (and Jewish) liturgies typically include multiple readings from the Bible, and it is widely recognised that these readings provide structure for the liturgy. Less attention, however, has been given to the reverse dynamic—how liturgy shapes and structures the biblical text.

This paper explores the use of the Bible in the Eucharistic liturgy of the Church of Norway, in altar books from 1889 to the present. Notably, these altar books present the biblical passage as the “words of institution,” a harmonisation of 1 Corinthians 11 and the so-called institution narratives, without reference to a specific biblical text.

I argue that rituals—here, the Eucharist—create sites of practice that actively contribute to the shaping and materialization of the Bible. First, liturgical prescriptions establish literary contexts for biblical texts. Second, the repeated performance of liturgical acts embeds authoritative interpretations into these texts. Ultimately, these processes influence the ongoing formation of the Bible.

Tobias Ålöw, University of Oslo, “Apparitions of Authority: Bakhtinian Heteroglossia and the Pauline Body in the Lyrics to Ghost’s ‘Satanized’”

My paper employs M. Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia to analyze the function of the Latin quote of 1 Corinthians 6:19 in the lyrics to the acclaimed Swedish heavy metal band Ghost’s song “Satanized.” The song frames demonic possession as a metaphor for romantic love and erotic longing, casting overwhelming emotion as an invasive force that seizes and governs the self, much as an evil spirit might. In Ghost’s formulation, however, it is not a demon but romantic yearning and sexual desire that overpower the narrator, rendering him unable to resist. More specifically, the lyrics articulate the torment of a clerical figure struggling with forbidden desire, portraying his longing as a form of spiritual infidelity toward God—indeed as “blasphemy” and “heresy”—from which he implores divine deliverance. The paper argues that, rather than functioning as a detached aesthetic allusion, the Pauline text emerges as one voice among many within a polyphonic soundscape. Through a deliberate colliding of registers, “Satanized” recontextualizes the original ethical and theological concerns of 1 Cor 6:19, presenting Scripture not as a fixed monologic authority but as a contested, dialogic presence. Through an amalgamation of linguistic code-switching and phono-textual variation, the citation operates as an opposing voice to that of the narrator and emerges as the declaration of an ecclesial authority chiding romantic and erotic impulses. In sum, drawing on reception history, intertextual analysis, and not least Bakhtinian theory, the study demonstrates how Ghost’s use of scripture exemplifies a mode of biblical *Nachleben* in which sacred text circulates through parody, ritual mimicry, and sonic excess.

Morten Beckmann, University of Agder, “Hell is Loose: Reinventing the Afterlife in Martin Luther’s 1545 Translation”

How did Martin Luther’s retranslation of the Bible contribute to the construction of a dualistic afterlife structured around a heaven-hell dichotomy? The paper explores how Luther’s translation contributed to a reconceptualization of the afterlife and argues that his translation

should be understood as a site where prevailing conceptions of the afterlife were actively renegotiated. The study seeks to contribute to the renewed scholarly interest in the intersection of translation and history (Hermans 2022; Rundle 2022), particularly by examining how translation is embedded in historical contexts – “nested in their historical environment and interacting with that environment and its history” (Hermans 2022, vii). The aim, then, is to “understand a slice of history by studying the role of translation in it” (Hermans 2022, 27), and to ask, in the words of Christopher Rundle, “what translation call tell us about history” (Rundle 2012, 239; 2014, 7).

This paper examines Martin Luther’s 1545 Bible retranslation as a discursive intervention that reshaped Catholic conceptions of the afterlife, reinforcing a dualistic heaven–hell framework. Rather than treating translation as a mere linguistic transfer, the study positions Luther’s work within its socio-historical context, arguing that translation actively participates in theological and institutional transformation. Methodologically, the research adopts a corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) informed by Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, integrating textual analysis, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice. This approach enables a systematic investigation of how linguistic choices in translation interact with broader ideological shifts during the Protestant Reformation.

At the textual level, the analysis focuses on three key Greek lexemes associated with the afterlife—hadēs, tartaroō, and geenna—and traces their renderings across the Greek New Testament, the Latin Vulgate, and Luther’s German Bible. Using corpus tools such as collocation and concordance analysis, the study identifies frequency patterns and semantic tendencies that reveal optional shifts— shifts that are not dictated by linguistic constraints, but preferred over ideological reasons.

## Socio-cognitive and Evolutionary Approaches to the New Testament

Chair: Thomas Kazen, University College Stockholm

Johanna Saari, University of Helsinki, “Memory in Early Christian Mission”

In the presentation I ask how the missionary context of the early Christian movement affected the remembering of Jesus. Traditionally, scholarship on the historical Jesus since the heyday of form criticism has treated the kerygmatic aims of early Christians as generative forces behind Jesus traditions. However, the scholarly discussion lacks a tangible picture on the how the missionary activity shaped the traditions of Jesus. What did the mission look like after Jesus’ death and, in light of modern research on memory and mind, what kind of remembering did the missionary activity produce?

Early Christian texts depicting missionary activity of Jesus’ followers are found in several texts and text types; the mission discourses in the synoptic gospels and Q, references to missionary activity in the Pauline letters, instructions on how to receive teachers and apostles in the Didache, as well as Papias’ writings concerning knowledge transmission in the turn of the second century. Analyzing a selection of these texts, I aim to draw a better picture of what the early missionary activity might have looked like in order to understand its effects on memory. Memory is approached from a 4E-cognitive perspective, understanding it to be embodied, embedded, extended, and enacted.

By applying the 4E-cognitive approach on the missionary context, it is possible to understand early Christian remembering in a wider sense than the usual memory-tradition-dichotomy. The hypothesis of this paper is that the early missionary work was highly practical, embodied, and action-oriented in nature. It produced a type of knowledge transmission that operated on the nondeclarative, skill-learning type of memory system in addition to the declarative memory system. The early mission might not have been so much about transmitting memorized traditions about Jesus, but transmitting knowledge on how to acquire a transformation in the mind-body, resulting in physical changes in the form of healing and exorcism.

Harri Söderholm, University of Helsinki, “Old Stories, New Tools: A Laboratory Experiment with Early Christian Martyr Narratives”

Why were early Christians so fascinated by martyrdom? Can a cognitive–evolutionary perspective help explain this phenomenon, and can it be studied experimentally?

Martyrdom is a striking and puzzling feature of early Christian literature. While martyr narratives and related discourse appear frequently in early Christian sources, their historical reliability has been widely questioned. The “age of persecutions” is increasingly understood as a largely literary construct, and most early Christians likely encountered martyrdom primarily through narratives rather than lived experience. This raises a central question: why did martyr narratives become so widespread and influential in early Christian communities?

Drawing on cultural evolutionary theory and cognitive psychology, this paper explores the possibility that early Christian martyr narratives functioned as cognitively and emotionally optimal cultural products. Such narratives may attract attention more effectively, elicit stronger emotional responses, and be remembered more reliably than alternative forms of discourse, thereby gaining a selective advantage in cultural transmission.

To examine this hypothesis, our EXPRECCE research project conducted a preregistered laboratory experiment with 91 participants, measuring emotional responses to martyr narratives using pupillometry, skin conductance, and self-report questionnaires. Memorability was assessed both immediately after exposure and one week later.

The experiment forms part of my doctoral research, which applies experimental and computational methods to the study of early Christianity, with a particular focus on martyrdom. The paper presents the underlying research idea and, if analyses are completed in time, some preliminary results.

## SEMINAR SESSION II – SUNDAY, 9.00–10.30

Greco-Roman Society and Literature and the New Testament

Chair: Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson, University of Münster

Daniel Hjort, Johannelund School of Theology, “Imitation of Role Models in Greco-Roman Biographies and in the Gospel of Matthew”

Imitation is an important theme in the New Testament in general, and in the gospels in particular. But how are we to understand the concept of imitation in the NT? What are the followers expecting to imitate? Is it related to concrete, practical issues in lifestyle and leadership (habits, skills)? Is it related to becoming like the role model in a more general sense (traits, qualities)? Is it related to both? Where do we find the emphasis?

This paper analyses examples mainly in Greco-Roman literature, especially biographies (for the sake of the genre of the gospels), and highlights some common features. These features are then discussed in relation to the understanding of the imitation of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, but also concerning the distinctive features of the gospel. It is suggested that imitation in Matthew, which is emphasized, relates to both general qualities and specific skills.

Ioannis Nusias, Uppsala University, “Does Paul Reflect an Aristotelian Concept of Change in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52?”

In this paper, I will discuss the claim made by some scholars that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, invokes a conception of change that reflects Aristotelian thought. The paper will begin by offering some remarks on the spread of Aristotle’s philosophy during, or in close proximity to, the lifetime of Paul, with the aim of showing that it is plausible that Paul may have encountered aspects of the Peripatetic tradition. More generally, knowledge of the reception of a specific tradition (in this case, the Aristotelian) is relevant when assessing the likelihood that a given author was familiar with, or influenced by, a particular idea. I will subsequently present the arguments advanced by Jeffrey R. Asher and Troels Engberg-Pedersen concerning an Aristotelian understanding of change in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52. Finally, I will problematize their interpretation, while nevertheless concluding that a vague Aristotelian echo may be discernible in these verses.

Sara Saarela, University of Eastern Finland, “Parables in Paul’s Letters: What, How, and Why?”

What are Paul’s parables and how do they function in his letters as part of his argumentation? Biblical scholars have studied extensively the parables in the Synoptics and in recent years also their argumentative and persuasive function; however, Paul’s letters have not been studied from this perspective as scholars have rarely acknowledged the existence of parables in his letters. Recognizing and studying the parables in Paul’s letters is an essential part of gaining a better understanding of his argumentation and how he wishes to influence his audiences. Once the parables are identified, it is possible to study how and why Paul uses them. Modern argumentation analysis helps with this task, and in my research, I use Stephen Toulmin’s model since it has been designed to analyse human argumentation (as opposed to rigid formal logic) – a category in which Paul’s writings belong.

In my paper, I will describe the definition of a parable and present a list of Paul's parables found in those seven letters the scholarly consensus holds as authentic. Then I will briefly explain how the Toulmin model works and through a few examples demonstrate how it is used to analyze Paul's parables. The presentation is based on my doctoral project and its findings so far.

Jewish Texts and Traditions in Early Christianity

Chair: Lukas Hagel, Lund University

Katja Kujanpää, University of Helsinki, "Contradictions within the Scriptures? Paul and Barnabas Playing One Quotation against Another"

Can there be contradictions within the scriptures? This paper explains why Paul and the author of the Epistle of Barnabas offer different answers to this question. Both make use of the rhetorical effect created by direct quotations. Both also intentionally juxtapose quotations from different sources. Both are challenged by the question of the relationship of non-Jewish Christ-followers to the Torah. Yet, in the end, they construct the authority of the Jewish Scriptures and the authority of their interpreters differently. Through a number of examples, I will discuss their argumentative strategies and the role that direct quotations play in these strategies. I will demonstrate that how the two authors address the question of potential contradictions within the scriptures reflects their hermeneutic patterns, argumentative aims, and social context.

Martin Landgren, University College Stockholm, "'The Middle Ground in Jewish Relations' and the Dating of Ignatius – Some Considerations"

In this paper, I argue that the Ignatian letters stands as an example of an emerging "middle-ground" theology between Marcionite currents and Jewish currents in middle second century CE. The Roman empire was impacted by anti-Jewish sentiments as an effect of the Diaspora Revolts and the Bar Kochba Revolt. In light of the public impact of Roman campaigns against Jerusalem and quenching of Jewish revolts, the anti-Jewish sentiments should make impressions of emerging Christian theology. This is also perceivable in the emergence of Marcion and similar thinkers in Rome, who considered the Jewish God a demiurge, waging war against other nations. This is an important factor to consider when dating the Ignatian letters. In terms of the long debate on the provenance and date of these letters, one can see that the cultural backdrop has been an important factor in the discussion. Given Peter Tomson's recent article on knowns and unknowns of the second century, this paper argues that the author of the Ignatian letters constructs a middle ground for the addressed congregations. Most of the letters mirror the tension between halachic concerns and docetic tendencies. They neither denounce Jewish scriptures or the Jewish God as simply a demiurge, as would Valentinians, nor do they accept Jewish halakha, as would for example the Ebionites. Thus, the Ignatian letters project similar views as the stance taken by Justin Martyr in his now lost Syntagma. The Syntagma appears to be the text that is an inspiration for Against Heresies. The overall tendency in the second half of the second century sits well with the concerns of the Ignatian correspondence.

Jill Middlemas, University of Gothenburg, "The Concept of the Divine Image in the Hebrew Bible and Issues of Inclusion in Paul's Letter to the Galatians (3:28)"

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he presents an argument that reflects, what could be (and frequently has been) interpreted as the astonishingly egalitarian or leveling nature of the Jewish-Christian message. He suggests that no ethnic, socio-economic, and gender distinction should exist in the new community in Galatians 3 :28. In making his argument to the church in Galatia, Paul makes a startling, yet subtle, change in the rhetoric of the third word pair of male and female, which is widely agreed to stem from the Greek Septuagint text of Gen. 1 :27. Behind the quotation is a greater Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament tradition that the human male and the human female are the only creatures that share the likeness of the divine image. This presentation explores the statement in its HBOT background with particular attention to attitudes towards the imago Dei in the HBOT literature. Further, it considers whether Galatians 3 :28 contains a broader message about the sanctity of human life that is in keeping with Paul's thought and which could fruitfully contribute towards modern discussions and attitudes about human rights.

Power, Hierarchies and Asymmetries and the New Testament

Chair: Ellen Aasland Reinertsen, University of Oslo

Camilla Brokholm Pedersen, Aarhus University, "'Read these verses with faith': Augustine's Use of Biblical Texts in His Letters on Sexual Violence"

My paper investigates Augustine's use of biblical texts in his letters addressing cases of rape and sexual violence. These letters also form a part of my PhD thesis on Augustine's writings on rape, sexual violence, and consolation. Augustine's letters on these matters can overall be divided into two groups: 1) those focusing on legislative or other external problems regarding rape and sexual violence, and 2) those with greater emphasis on human suffering, conscience, and consolation. Although there are overlaps between the two, I have observed that Augustine only quotes biblical texts in the latter. In this paper I concentrate on examining letter 111 and the companion letters 77 and 78 since they are remarkably rich in biblical quotations (mainly NT quotes in letter 77 and 78) and, when placed next to one another, they form an interesting comparison of male-female and male-male violation.

The paper is guided by a double question: which biblical texts does Augustine make use of when addressing cases of rape and sexual violence in the letters mentioned above, and what reflections on suffering and healing do these choices reveal?

In answering this, I draw upon Josef Lössl's observation that early Christianity continued the idea from Classical culture that 'the word' (ὁ λόγος) holds a therapeutic power (Lössl, "Continuity and Transformation of Ancient Consolation in Augustine of Hippo" 2013, 157). I explore how Augustine's use of biblical texts engages with *consolatio* as a literary genre, and I suggest that Augustine's employs biblical narratives as consolatory metanarratives and presents confession as a tool in actively participating in the metanarratives.

In short, my paper situates Augustine's consolation within the context of sexual violence with a special focus on the role of biblical texts and narratives.

Heikki Hietanen, University of Helsinki, “Why Exactly Did They Not ‘Hold Everything in Common’: The Disturbing Presence of Four Others in Interpreting Acts 2:44 and 4:32”

The historicity and relevance of the idea of common ownership of property in the Early Church, as attested in Acts 2:44 and 4:32, has been largely met with dismissive attitudes among scholars of the Bible. Despite varying positions on Luke's general historical accuracy, this detail is quite broadly regarded either as Luke's literary innovation to create a prestigious past, or at best, fleeting and voluntary practice of charity that was soon abandoned. Without making any claims of historicity of the practice as such, this paper investigates the possible reasons behind such scholarly dismissiveness. I will argue, that the readiness to dismiss common ownership, especially in 20th Century scholarship, aligns itself readily with general western mainline protestant anxieties about four Others against which the identities of such interpreters had been defined: If sharing property with the community was mandatory, emerging Christianity might look suspiciously like the prevalent stereotypes of Judaism (a "religion of works"), sectarianism (total separation from society), Catholicism (monasticism) and Communism - and as such inconceivable as a feature of the myth of Christian origins.

As a part of my larger post-doc project, this paper will use as its case study a selection of the most widespread popular (yet to some extent academically grounded) commentaries in Finland, many of which are translations from other Nordic languages. I will demonstrate, how in such works, the influence of both Martin Luther, and of later generations of Biblical interpreters is readily evident – and the way the idea of common ownership is presented reflects these inherited traditions also in our Nordic context.

Jacob Munk Rosenlund, Aarhus University, “‘The Voice of the Bridegroom’ as Production of Presence in Patristic Writings on John 3:29”

In John 3:29, John the Baptist likens himself to the friend who rejoices at “the voice of the bridegroom”. Current scholarship predominantly interprets this as an eschatological appropriation of Jeremiah’s nuptial metaphors of divine restoration. In this paper, however, I argue that early Christian readings primarily understood “the voice of the bridegroom” as effecting what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht terms a production of presence. Origen, Augustine and Chrysostom each accorded the phrase a constitutive role in articulating how the divine presence is encountered through the reading of Scripture. This, I suggest, reflects an ancient trope in which acts of reading were imagined in terms of marriage, desire, and sexuality. Attending to this trope not only reframes John 3:29 beyond eschatological symbolism but also illuminates how early Christian hermeneutics conceptualized the reading of Scripture as sensorially and erotically inflected: a production of presence rather than a decoding of signification.

Socio-cognitive and Evolutionary Approaches to the New Testament

Chair: Kamilla Skarström Hinojosa, University of Gothenburg

Thomas Kazen, University College Stockholm, “Matthew in a World of Apocalyptic Myth: Emotions and Conceptual Blending in Matthew’s Expansions and Reworkings”

Although not characterised as apocalyptic in genre, the gospel traditions are brimful of mythic-apocalyptic imagery. All gospel authors develop the apocalyptic imagery of the Jesus tradition and adapt it to their own narratives and ideologies. The author of the gospel of

Matthew greatly expands the apocalyptic imagery in his own ambiguous way all through his gospel, from the story of temptation in the desert to the passion and resurrection narratives. Is he pushing this imagery in an absurdly literalistic direction or could he possibly be creating mythopoeic narrative from theology? Or is he reflecting the concrete world in apocalyptic myth? The present paper employs versions of conceptual blending theory for analysing Matthew's apocalyptic imagery, its mythical character, and the emotions evoked by it. It also draws on Ernst Cassirer's theory of myth and language. The results suggest that Matthew's world of apocalyptic myth has both a depictive and performative function in relation to the real world of life experience and human agency.

Aldar Nõmmik, University College Stockholm, "What Is Intuitive about Divination? Cognitive Science Approaches to Descriptions of Prophetic Activity in Philo and Paul"

Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) distinguishes two modes of reasoning – fast and intuitive on the one hand and slow and reflective on the other. Humans rely on both modes of reasoning to navigate the complexities of life. However, numerous experiments have shown that these two modes of reasoning may be in conflict with one another. For example, we may strongly hold to certain reflective beliefs, while simultaneously make spur-of-the-moment decisions on a set of intuitive beliefs that do not easily match with our reflective beliefs. This friction creates fascinating inconsistencies in our behavior and in our self-expression in speech and writing.

Cognitive scientists are in general agreement that our basic cognitive mechanisms have not changed much in the last several thousand years. Thus, we may be confident that our ancient subjects also relied on both the intuitive and reflective modes of reasoning in their engagement with their environment. However, due to the tools available in historical-critical method, the tendency in biblical scholarship is to look for consistency in ancient thought on a particular subject, whether in a movement (e. g., Stoicism) or in a collection of writings by a single author (e. g., Paul). Often, inconsistencies are minimized or ignored altogether, because the tools we use to engage with the ancient material do not provide means to satisfactorily deal with inconsistencies.

However, cognitive science as it relates to intuitive and reflective modes of reasoning provides fascinating insight into that part of our cognition which allows us to fruitfully analyze inconsistencies in ancient thought. In this paper, I apply the insights gained from cognitive science of religion to analyzing Philo's conflicting descriptions of and ruminations about divination (including prophetic activity). I also demonstrate how the lessons we learn from such engagement with the more loquacious Philo can illuminate Paul's relatively pithy but likewise conflicting descriptions of prophetic activity in 1 Cor 11-14.

## Apocalypticism in the New Testament

Chair: Lotta Valve, University of Eastern Finland

### Merete Hodt, MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, “Apocalyptic Apologetics in 2 Corinthians”

Recent reassessments of the “apocalyptic Paul” (e.g., Davies & Barclay 2022) have clarified how apocalypticism shapes Pauline theology. Less attention has been given to how Paul’s apocalyptic understanding of knowledge and perception informs his rhetorical self-presentation in 2 Corinthians.

This paper asks: How does Paul’s apocalyptic epistemology—centered on divine unveiling and Spirit-enabled perception—reshape the criteria by which he is perceived and evaluated?

Focusing on 2 Cor 3–5 and 10–13, in dialogue with 1 Cor 2, I argue that Paul reconfigures evaluative norms from “according to the flesh” to Spirit-enabled perception. Because his bodily presence appears weak, his authority is contested. Paul reframes the issue: the failure to discern Christ’s power at work in his weakness does not undermine his apostleship, but exposes a failure of perception among his critics, for whom reality remains veiled. Paul’s apologetics thus turns on an apocalyptic reversal: what appears as weakness becomes the decisive site of divine disclosure.

### Ludvig Nyman, Lund University, “Reaching Back to Sinai: 2 Cor 3 and Apocalyptic Claims for Legitimacy”

A common challenge for the writers of Jewish apocalyptic texts is how to legitimize the interpretations and claims put forward. This paper examines one recurrent approach according to which the figure of Moses in general, and the Sinai event in particular, is used for relating the proposed interpretations and claims for legitimacy to the biblical tradition. More specifically, several apocalyptic texts claim legitimacy by presenting their seemingly new insights as actually going back to Sinai. This claim, it is argued, is found in different works such as Jubilees, 4 Ezra, and the Temple Scroll. The main contribution of this paper is, then, to suggest that this mode of legitimization sheds new light on Paul’s much-debated argument concerning Moses’s descent from Mount Sinai in 2 Cor 3:7–18 (cf. Exod 34:29–35). Put differently, the apocalyptically inclined Paul claims that his message concerning Christ and the new covenant is not new but reaches back all the way to Sinai.

### Anna Rebecca Solevåg, VID Specialized University, “Coronapocalypse: Polemics of Apocalypse and Plague in Covid-19 and Its Aftermath”

The idea that plague is a sign of the end times occurs only once in the entire Bible, in Luke 21:11. I have argued in a recent article (Solevåg, 2025) that this notion develops into a strong current in the aftermath of the Black Death (1346–1353), and becomes prevalent in Western Christian imagination as well as in modern popular culture. It is only in modernity that one of the four horsemen in Rev 6:8 is conceptualized as “plague.” The paper will look at several cases of biblical interpretation during Covid and in its aftermath. The first case is academic articles on Covid from medicine and health sciences that use the four horsemen as a conceptual tool. Surprisingly, this apocalyptic concept seems to be a meaningful conversation

partner for scientists as they are making arguments about health policy and medicine. The second is evangelical preachers who claimed that the Covid vaccine was the mark of the beast (Rev 16:2). I will explore the interconnections between the anti-vaccination movement and apocalyptic sentiment. The final case concerns right wing theories that frame empathy as a parasitic plague. This notion, argued by Gad Saad and popularized by Elon Musk, is also entangled with biblical polemics of plague. I will argue that these cases suggest that there is a diffuse connection in popular imagination between plague and biblical ideas of apocalypse far beyond what is ordinarily assumed.

## Greco-Roman Society and Literature and the New Testament

Chair: Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson, University of Münster

### Gunnar Samuelsson, University of Gothenburg, “The Alkimila Graffito Reconsidered”

This paper re-examines the so-called Alkimila graffito, discovered in 1961 on the west wall of taberna 5 in Pozzuoli (Puteoli), and frequently cited as early material evidence for Roman crucifixion. In both popular and scholarly reception—especially in discussions connected to the Shroud of Turin and in John Granger Cook’s work—the graffito has been interpreted as depicting a crucified female named Alkimila, complete with nails, a sedile, and other anatomical and technical details. By returning to the archaeological setting and comparing drawn reconstructions with the preserved traces on the wall, I argue that many such claims exceed what the evidence can responsibly sustain. What remains defensible is considerably more modest. The case illustrates how interpretative evolution can arise when later drawings and expectations replace the ambiguity of the primary material, and it offers a methodological proposal for handling fragmentary non-literary sources in discussions of ancient suspension punishments and early Christian reception.

### Victoria Vasquez, Uppsala University, “A Noble Death Disrupted: Luke 22:43–44 and Early Christian Reception of Jesus’s Agony”

Luke 22:43-44 is a crux interpretum on multiple levels. Not only is the text-critical evidence remarkably split, making it notoriously difficult to determine whether it belongs to the original text of Luke. But it is also difficult to explain its contents, where Jesus is assisted by an angel and experiences so much anxiety that he breaks out in sweat like drops of blood. Regardless of where one lands on the text-critical issue, the interpreter faces the task to explain how the passage fits within the Lukan version of Jesus on the Mount of Olives. How does the portrait of an anxious Jesus fit into Luke’s otherwise “stoic” and controlled image of Jesus?<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, according to common ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish ideals of a “noble death,” how you faced death was an important aspect of whether your death was deemed as honourable or not. The fact that this passage seems to stand in counterpoint to the “stoic” suffering of Luke’s Jesus leads to questions regarding early Christian receptions of Jesus’s death.

Bart Ehrman states that text criticism is not just about finding the earliest versions or manuscripts, but it is also a window to the earliest reception. This paper will hold that Luke 22:43-44 is an interpolation, and discuss that, as such, these verses do not only tell us something about the reception of Luke’s passion narrative, but also about how early Christians understood/negotiated Jesus’s emotional state in Gethsemane.

By focussing on Luke 22:43-44 in light of ancient ideals of the noble death, this paper will complement the text-critical debates of authenticity and historicity, and instead reflect on what the interpolation might tell us about early Christian reception of Jesus's struggles when facing death.

#### Jewish Texts and Traditions in Early Christianity

Chair: Lukas Hagel, Lund University

#### Jacob Munk Rosenlund, Aarhus University, "Burying the Bridegroom: John's Use of the Song of Songs in Context of Jesus' Burial"

For many years, the Song of Songs was considered peripheral to the imaginative horizons of New Testament writers. In recent decades, however, scholars like Ann Roberts Winsor, Jocelyn McWhirter and Andrea Taschl-Erber have recognized the importance of the Song of Songs for the nuptial imagery in the Gospel of John.

In this paper, I identify a pattern that has so far received little attention—namely, that John specifically evokes the olfactory imagery of the Song of Songs in relation to Jesus' burial. This, I propose, reflects a Greco-Roman trope where weddings and funerals were aligned based on common ritual elements. In adopting this trope, John simultaneously transforms it in light of his distinctive notion of Jesus' death.

#### Pasi Schultz, University of Eastern Finland, "From a Winged River to a Sea Dragon: Allusions to Isaiah 7–8 in Rev 12"

Revelation 12, the cosmic battle between the Dragon and the Queen of Heaven, is a pivotal chapter in the book. Many scholars have identified in it a reference to the Immanuel prophesy in Isa 7:14. Others have suggested that the chapter reflects the star-lore of the surrounding cultures. In this paper I will propose that these readings should be combined to appreciate the hermeneutical process behind the composition of the chapter. I will also suggest that in Isaiah it is not only the Immanuel sign which should be considered, but also that of Maher-shalal-hash-baz in chapter 8.

#### Power, Hierarchies and Asymmetries and the New Testament

Chair: Ellen Aasland Reinertsen, University of Oslo

#### Annette Hjort Knudsen, University of Copenhagen, "Paradoxes of Power in the Book of Acts"

Throughout the narrative of Acts an abundance of more or less powerful agents perform an equally abundant number of actions. These actions, however, are not equally consequential. Some have no impact on the story that follows, even if the agent is seemingly powerful, while others have huge consequences, even if the agent is not characterized as influential on the surface of the story. This discrepancy between the power of the agent and the impact of the action prompts the question: What is the understanding of power in Acts as reflected in the numerous tales of agents, actions, and consequences?

Building on the notion of paratext, developed and coined by Gérard Genette<sup>1</sup> and further developed for ancient texts by Loveday Alexander<sup>2</sup>, the present reading of Acts explores a

possible interpretative framework for analysing the notion of power and authority in Acts. According to Alexander “ancient authors made extensive use of prefaces, transitional summaries, and epilogues ... [paratext] can in antiquity be found in the narrative itself, especially in its opening and closing scenes”.

Following Alexander’s suggestion, the opening (1.1-12) and the closing (28.30-31) scenes are included as paratextual elements of the narrative of Acts. A transitional summary is identified in 16.13-15 when Paul encounters Lydia by the riverside outside of Philippi. This sequence is therefore included as the third paratextual element. The title of the narrative, Πράξεις Ἀποστόλων, constitutes the last paratextual element explored in the present reading of Acts.

The proposed paper presents an interpretative framework embracing and structuring the narrative of Acts by distinguishing between the text that guides the reading (paratext) and the text that tells the story (narrative), even if one and the same textual sequence can serve as both. This framework enables a reading that traces the impact of the spiritual empowerment promised in the opening scene on the understanding of human powers and authorities presented in Acts. Bringing the encounter with Lydia to the centre of attention in the present reading, the narrative of Acts seems to question any straightforward relation between human hierarchies and divine empowerment.

Jennifer Nyström, University of Gothenburg, “Apocalypse and Amalek: New Testament Reception in Christian Zionist Responses to the Israel– Hamas War”

This paper examines how a Jerusalem-based Christian Zionist organization has received and mobilized New Testament texts in response to the 2023–2025 Israel– Hamas war, and how this reception interacts with the famous usage of the biblical Amalek trope. Drawing primarily on newsletters and digital communications, it analyzes how New Testament apocalyptic and spiritual-warfare idioms frame contemporary violence as participation in a divinely ordained struggle. At the same time, the Amalek trope performs three interrelated functions: collapsing historical distance between biblical text and present conflict, moralizing warfare through typological identification, and sacralizing political solidarity with Israel within an eschatological narrative. The paper asks whether New Testament reception operates as an independent theological resource or primarily serves to translate and legitimate Amalek-inspired frameworks of enmity, highlighting how scripture shapes ethical perception, affective response, and geopolitical alignment in moments of crisis.

## Receptions of the New Testament

Chair: Anders Martinsen, Oslo Metropolitan University

Britt Dahlman, Lund University, “The Bible in the Greek and Latin Cassian”

This paper discusses how biblical material is used in the writings of John Cassian. According to most scholars Cassian’s works were originally written in Latin, from which the Greek versions were later translated. In previous articles I have suggested that Cassian originally wrote his first work, the *Institutes*, in Greek, which then was translated into Latin. His second work, the *Collationes*, was, in my opinion, first written in Latin. The Latin version preserved today, however, is a later revision from an older draft that was translated into Greek. Thus, the Greek version of the *Collationes* reflects a primary version. Can Cassian’s use of the Bible shed light on the challenging questions of language and primacy of the compositions? The Latin Cassian

uses Bible quotations and allusions from the Old Latin text (Vetus Latina), from the Vulgate text, and from his own translation of the Greek text or from his memory. I will argue that the Greek Institutes has no clear signs of quotations that are translated from the Vulgate, and that the Latin Institutes has the character of a metaphrastic, rewritten and expanded text, where some Bible allusions found in the Greek version are lost or are less clear. However, in the Greek Collationes there are several examples of Bible quotations that seem to be translated from the Vulgate. The investigation is carried out with the help of digital tools, especially APDB (the Apophthegmata Patrum Database; <http://collectio.compliq.se/APDB>), a dynamic library created using the Collectio software. With this tool Bible names, quotations, paraphrases and allusions in patristic texts can be searched for and compared. Output from the library can be used in other applications for creating various kinds of visualizations.

#### Gunnar Haaland, NLA University College, “Nativity and Violence: Intertextual and Theological Explorations of *Biblia pauperum nova* in and beyond the Classroom”

Together with three colleagues, I brought *Biblia pauperum nova* by the Danish picturebook creators Oscar K. (words) and Dorte Karrebæk (images) (Copenhagen: Alfa, 2012) into a high school classroom to allow the students to explore and discuss this unorthodox and thought-provoking adaptation of the gospels and the medieval *Biblia pauperum*. We told the students to engage with two spreads in particular: the annunciation scene and the nativity scene.

This intervention is already reported in a book chapter, but we could not discuss all our data in a sufficient manner. To my great regret, we left out an interesting student discussion about the nativity scene accompanied with Cain killing Abel and Abraham being about to kill Isaac. The intertextual and intervisual play on this spread proved difficult for the students to grasp. The violent images combined with Joseph wearing a Star of David produced uncertainty and Holocaust associations.

In my projected paper, I wish to analyze the student discussion and consider intertextual, intervisual and theological potentials that the students did not explore – including the corresponding image in the medieval *Biblia pauperum*.

In my view, the quotation at the top of the image provides an interpretive key: “Nu er det jul igjen. Og julen varer lige til påske”.

#### Joel Kuhlin, Lund University, “The Failure of the End: Apocalyptic Imaginary and the Immanence of the World in Roy Andersson’s Living Trilogy”

This paper examines Roy Andersson’s Living Trilogy as a cinematic meditation on the failure of eschatology. While the trilogy is often interpreted through the lenses of absurdism, secular melancholy, or Andersson’s stylised tableau aesthetics, I argue that it also articulates a profound cinematic reception of biblical apocalyptic motifs. Andersson constructs a visual theology in which the end of the world haunts the present not as a future divine intervention but as a condition of apocalyptic immanence: the world persists, emptied of transcendence, permeated by unresolved catastrophe.

Central to this argument is Andersson’s recurring use of biblical figures and scenes, which appear not as triumphant eschatological signs but as diminished, fragile, and displaced. His films repeatedly return to the imagery of Christ, martyrdom, and especially the crucifixion, which Andersson has described as a foundational human image. In the Living Trilogy and in *About Endlessness*, Jesus’ death is not depicted as salvific resolution but as an unassimilated

wound, a historical trauma that shapes human suffering without offering consolation. The Good Friday theme becomes a key to Andersson's world: redemption has not arrived, yet the weight of crucifixion persists. In this sense, Andersson's cinema practices an anti-eschatological Christology—a mode of biblical reception that foregrounds Incarnation and Passion stripped of Resurrection's transcendence.

The trilogy's intertextual refrain "Jag såg..." invokes the visionary formula of the Book of Revelation, yet Andersson empties it of prophetic agency. Instead of an unveiling of divine truth, the viewer witnesses fragmented, helpless, and often bewildered perceptions. The filmic witness becomes a figure of eschatological exhaustion. Combined with Andersson's wide shots, meticulous staging, and refusal of narrative progression, these biblical references participate in a rhetoric of eschatological failure: the apocalypse arrives without climax, revelation without meaning, judgement without judge.

By situating Andersson's stylised cinematography within traditions of biblical reception and apocalyptic imagination, this paper demonstrates how his films reconfigure scriptural themes into a distinctly modern eschatological sensibility. This reading contributes to contemporary debates on secular apocalypticism, film and religion, and the visual cultures of crisis. Andersson's cinema reveals how biblical figures—above all the dying Christ—continue to shape modern imaginaries of the end, not through transcendence, but through their haunting persistence within an immanent, unfinished world.

Apocalypticism in the New Testament

Chair: Tobias Hägerland, University of Gothenburg

Maria Sturesson, Lund University, “A Rupture in Time: On Mark's and Matthew's Resurrection Narratives Between History and Apocalypse”

In this paper, I argue that the resurrection narratives in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew constitute a narrative space in which elements of historiography and apocalypse converge. Situated between past event and future expectation, the resurrection narrative, and in particular the stories of the empty tomb, function as sites where past history and anticipated eschatological horizons are brought together.

This convergence becomes visible through several shared narrative features. First, the presence of a messenger figure, the young man in Mark and the angel in Matthew, draws on apocalyptic conventions of revelation and disclosure, while simultaneously fulfilling a historiographical function by interpreting and authorizing the narrated event. Second, both narratives exhibit a pronounced visual orientation: sense perception, bodily gestures, spatial movement, and sudden appearances are rendered with a vividness that invites the reader to see the events as they unfold. This visuality operates as a mode of making the eschatological future perceptible within the narrative present, and it also guides the reader in response through the apocalyptic horizon.

The use of vivid and descriptive language, including Mark's frequent deployment of the historical present, intensifies the scenes and collapses temporal distance. Taken together, these elements suggest that the resurrection narratives function as texts “in between,” where historiographical narration is reshaped by apocalyptic imagination, and where the future apocalypse is at work within history.

Lotta Valve, University of Eastern Finland, “Revisiting the Carcass and the Vultures”

The saying about the carcass and the vultures in Jesus's discussion of the end times (Matt 24:28; Luke 17:37) has always puzzled interpreters. Its intended meaning and rhetorical function appear unclear, and the placement of the discourse differs between Matthew and Luke. In my paper, I will make a review of the ancient and scholarly interpretations for the saying and propose some alternative lines of interpretation.

Cecilia Wassén, Uppsala University, “Third Temple Movements and the Use of the New Testament in Contemporary Apocalyptic Discourse”

This paper examines the modern development of ideas and practices promoting the construction of a Third Temple in Jerusalem, focusing on the interaction between evangelical Christian networks and contemporary Jewish temple-oriented groups. While emerging from distinct theological traditions, these actors increasingly converge around shared eschatological expectations that translate biblical interpretation into concrete political and ritual initiatives.

The first part of the paper traces key stages in the formation of Third Temple advocacy, situating these movements within broader trajectories of evangelical apocalypticism and modern Jewish messianic thought. The second part analyses the interpretation of biblical

texts—especially in the New Testament—mobilised to legitimate and support these convictions. It shows how eschatological and political frameworks reshape the meaning and function of these texts in contemporary discourse, generating new apocalyptic imaginaries.

#### Greco-Roman Society and Literature and the New Testament

Chair: Gunnar Samuelsson, University of Gothenburg

#### Jacob P. B. Mortensen, Aarhus University, “Computing Mark’s Genre”

This paper addresses the genre of Mark’s Gospel through a combination of learning techniques from information retrieval and natural language processing. Jacob P.B. Mortensen is responsible for the NT part of the paper. Yuri Bizzoni is responsible for the computational part. Yuri Bizzoni will not participate.

Several ancient genres have been proposed to serve as the host genre in which Mark participates. Scholars have proposed that the NT Gospels constitute a new literary genre *sui generis*, that Mark fits best among ancient Historiographies, Greek Novels, Tragedies, or Biographies. The scholarly consensus seems to be that Mark fits best among the ancient Biographies, even though alternative classifications continue to be voiced. So, the genre-debate is still open.

In this paper, I present our work on genre detection and classification of Mark’s Gospel using hierarchical centroid-based clustering and multiclass classification respectively. Instead of comparing Mark’s Gospel to one genre represented by a small number of examples, I will present a comparison of Mark’s Gospel to the following genres: Greek Historiographies, Greek Tragedies, Greek Novels, Greek Biographies, and “LXX single-person stories.” The total amount of texts to which I compare Mark will be approx. 150 texts.

The paper will concentrate on two major findings: First, in both supervised and unsupervised clustering, Mark groups with neither of the traditionally proposed genres. This is conspicuous and deserves analysis. Second, even if the genre construct for prose narratives may not have been clearly delineated in Antiquity, our results show that the respective groups cluster well together and, thus, provides a “genre signal.” Even though ancient authors creatively sampled from different genres, the overall tendency can be detected.

#### Joel Waris, University of Helsinki, “Nero and the Apocalyptic Imagination: Seneca, Lucan, and the Book of Revelation”

This paper seeks to situate the Book of Revelation within the continuum of Neronian apocalyptic tradition by comparing its literary motifs with those found in Seneca’s *Thyestes* and Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*. In all these works, the tyrant’s actions are presented in close association with visions of cosmic destruction, thereby enabling politically critical interpretations of the texts. Through a comparative framework centered on *Thyestes*, *Bellum Civile*, and *Revelation*, this study positions *Revelation* within the broader Mediterranean literary milieu and explores its relationship to Roman literary practices.

By shifting the interpretive focus from the well-studied connections between *Revelation* and Jewish apocalyptic literature to its potential dialogue with Neronian elite literature, this paper proposes a new perspective on *Revelation*’s political imagination. My hypothesis is that Jewish and Christian sources were not the first to connect Nero with apocalyptic catastrophe. Rather,

Seneca's and Lucan's possible critiques of Nero, together with their literary explorations of tyranny and world-ending scenarios, already create a conceptual link between Nero and apocalyptic events. These narrative strategies, visible in *Thyestes* and *Bellum Civile*, offer a fruitful and largely unexplored point of comparison for Revelation's political language.

This comparative literary-historical analysis therefore suggests that Revelation participates more deeply in Roman intellectual and literary practices than has previously been recognised. Highlighting its resonances with the apocalyptic imagination of Neronian Rome opens productive interpretive pathways for understanding how the text engages broader culturally relevant discourses by negotiating tyranny, imperial power, and the end of the world.

## Jewish Texts and Traditions in Early Christianity

Chair: Jill Middlemas, University of Gothenburg

Daniel Ridings, University of Gothenburg, "Peshar in 2 Clement"

The 2 Epistle of Clement has never attracted attention for its theological significance. Lightfoot (1889, 206) describes the author as being "confused in thought and slipshod in expression." It is "as a literary work, almost worthless" whose "intellectual poverty" is redeemed by its display of "lofty moral earnestness." At the same time he understood that 2 Clem. is of the highest value since it is "the product of an important age of which we possess only the scantiest remains." (1889, 208). The main focus of this presentation will be to document the multiple occurrences of peshar in 2 Clem. using criteria from studies of peshar in Qumran studies. Once this has been firmly established it will be argued that the existence of peshar has consequences for our classification of the author, most often seen as a former pagan, converted to the new movement. If the author can be seen as a representative of a Second Temple cultural sphere, it will inform us about the community being addressed and potentially provide a small piece of the puzzle to describe a period early in the history of the community, when polemics were not the focus.

The major issues have been 2 Clem. audience and particularly the writer's supposed opposition to gnostic opponents. Tuckett (2012) and Kelhoffer (2017) in particular have convincingly shown that such lines of inquiry will lead nowhere, for the simple reason that gnosticism is a term that is undefined and should probably be abandoned altogether.

This is a proposal to approach 2 Clem. as evidence for an age we have little, though considerably more evidence than Lightfoot's day. Several have remarked that 2 Clem. uses peshar technique in its interpretation of scripture. No one, however, has drawn the consequences of that observation.

The strategy will be to build on Lightfoot's observation that 2 Clem. is important evidence for a period about which we know more today than in his day, but still frustratingly little about the early Jesus movement. To do this it will be demonstrated that the peshar technique is used throughout the work. Once this has been shown it will be asked what that can imply for more modern claims, Tuckett (2012, 74–75), that the "Jewish aspect" and "non-Christian Jews" are virtually non-existent. That this is a former pagan addressing former pagans who uses Hebrew scriptures without any qualms as being "Christian."

It will tie into modern research on how texts were produced in antiquity as argued in Robin Faith Walsh's (2021) work on the origins of early Christian literature. We know that the

Qumran community produced texts professionally. Josephus informs us that the Essenes were spread out even to various communities. This presentation will demonstrate that one of the techniques, *peshar*, was used even in a Greek environment. What implications does this have for dating 2 Clem.? Did the technique survive under the radar for 70-80 years only to turn up in the latter part of the the first half of the second century? Or can this be a piece of scanty evidence of the dispersion after the Roman conquest? What speaks against dating 2 Clem. significantly earlier? Perhaps Lightfoot (1889, 203) was right when he qualified his date of not later than 140 CE with "... the topics ... suggest a very primitive, though not apostolic, age of the Church." Is it unreasonable to see this text as representing an important age that even pre-dates some of the texts that became canonized?

A definite answer can, of course, not be supplied, but the existence of *peshar* in the work could offer another angle with regard to provenance. Rome and Corinth have been raised as the most likely home of the work and Asia is usually ruled out. Does the existence of *peshar* bear on this question? Internal evidence has been used to support Corinth: 2 Clem. 7.1 "Many sail to earthly competition ...", understood as sailing to Corinth. *Peshar* in 2 Clem. is another piece of internal evidence seen multiple times in the work. Its existence does not necessarily rule out a provenance from Asia.

Samuel Tedder, University of Eastern Finland, "Why Is the Spirit So Central in Paul's Argument in Galatians?"

In this paper, I explore the role of the Spirit in Paul's argument in Galatians. As Paul begins the main body of the letter, he appeals to the reception of the Spirit by the Galatians (3:1-5). This is not simply an appeal to experience, as it connects to Israel's Scripture. The argument flows to a presentation of Abraham and the promised blessing to all the nations that climaxes in the reception of the Spirit (3:6-14). Unlike scholars (e.g., Thiessen), who find the connection between the promised blessing and the Spirit within the Abrahamic promise (descendants like the stars as a reference to pneumatic descendants), I perceive Paul's hermeneutical strategy to involve a reading of the Law with the Prophets. In Gal 3:14, Paul reads the Abrahamic promise of blessing in light of its reappropriation in the Prophets, especially in Isaiah 44:1-5. This hermeneutical strategy is present also elsewhere in Galatians (3:10-13; 4:21--5:1). Based on Paul's hermeneutical strategy, we can perceive that the Spirit is connected to the realization of the promise of blessing, as conceived by the Prophets in terms of the restoration, or better yet, the regeneration of the people of God that includes also the Gentiles. Hence, the Spirit functions as the sign of the inaugurated restoration reality (indicated also by Paul's reference to the Jerusalem "above" in Gal 4:26-27 with a citation from Isa 54:1), that is at the same time the inauguration of the new creation (Gal 6:15). The Spirit is thus conceived primarily in scriptural terms rather than in hellenistic/stoic terms.

This understanding of the Spirit's role was also crucial in the identity formation of the Galatian believers--they were part of the new creation people that would not necessitate identification with the historic people of God (the Jews) via circumcision and observance of the Mosaic Law. Paul proclaimed a Gospel that was deeply rooted in Israel's scriptural tradition, but also subversive to the current social order. The believers in Christ were called to be people of the Spirit and not of the "flesh" (Gal 3:3; 4:29) with implications on several levels.

In short, the Spirit is integral in Paul's argument in Galatians as the "scriptural" Spirit, whose reception signalled the inauguration of the new creation and the formation of the regenerated people of God that included both Jews and Gentiles.

## Power, Hierarchies and Asymmetries and the New Testament

Chair: Jennifer Nyström, University of Gothenburg

### Moona Kinnunen, University of Helsinki, “Queering the Lamb of God: Jesus, Animality and Ecocentrism”

“Lamb of God” is a title given to Jesus in many early Christian writings. While often understood simply as a symbol or a metaphor, what if Jesus would be interpreted as a lamb, without metaphors? What kind of opportunities Jesus’ animal identity would offer to critical animal studies and animal rights movement? As animal studies currently remind us of the perspective of the nonhuman, my aim is to bring the animal identity of Jesus to the conversation as well. This is done by analyzing how Jesus is represented as a lamb in the source texts of my article, primarily in the Gospel of John. From the perspective of queer studies, Jesus’ body already deconstructs multiple binaries: Jesus is polymorphic hybrid of a human and God, who can metamorphose into different matter, like bread and wine, and has no fixed gender. Queer studies together with animal studies offer a possibility to deconstruct the binary of human/animal, and even study Jesus intersectionally as a human/God/animal. The “Lamb Jesus” thus provides an innovative queer theological perspective to critical animal studies, and ultimately, a viewpoint to ecocentrism.

### Lauri Thurén, University of Eastern Finland, “‘Sell your cloak and buy a sword’ (Luke 22:36)”

This study challenges the pacifist conception of Jesus by examining the New Testament textual evidence regarding Jesus's attitude toward violence and security. The analysis reveals a complex figure who, on the one hand, teaches love of enemies and turning the other cheek, yet on the other hand encourages his disciples to arm themselves, himself employs violence in the temple courtyard, and depicts the use of force in his parables as a normal component of societal life. Jesus's personal security practices were sophisticated—he utilized boats as means of escape, resorted to clandestine signals, and strategically withdrew from threatening situations. In his rhetoric, God manifests ambivalently: unconditionally loving all yet simultaneously punishing wrongdoers—believers are to emulate his example only partially. In the Book of Revelation, this tension is resolved through eschatological violence, which Jesus himself exercises. The early Christian solution—delegating the use of force to governing authorities—represents a continuation of the early Jewish Jeremianic tradition rather than Jesus's original teaching. Jesus's model does not support such a clear differentiation between individual and collective ethics.

## Receptions of the New Testament

Chair: Tobias Ålöw, University of Oslo

### Daniel C. Maier, University of Copenhagen, “Scripture on Screen: Exploring the Bible in Digital Gaming”

This presentation investigates the representation of biblical material in contemporary video games, focusing on titles such as I Am Jesus Christ, Gate Zero, and Jesus Christ RPG. The study employs a threefold methodological approach: (1) analysis of the depiction of biblical content within the games themselves; (2) qualitative research into the developers’ backgrounds and

motivations; and (3) quantitative reception analysis to understand how these games are perceived and critiqued. By combining these approaches together, the paper aims to offer a holistic perspective on how the Bible is represented in video games in the 21st century. This study is intended as a pilot contribution to a broader project currently being developed at the University of Copenhagen on the reception of sacred scriptures in video games, addressing a significant gap in the study of religion in popular culture.

Anders Martinsen, Oslo Metropolitan University, “‘Real’ and ‘Unreal’ Homosexuality: A Critical Examination of The New Testament and the Norwegian Church, and the ‘Question of Homosexuality’”

The question of tolerance towards gays and lesbians in the Norwegian church was a vexed one during the latter half of the 20th century. The debate that came to be known as “homofilisørsmålet” (i.e. the question of homosexuality) almost led to a split within the church. The conflict can be seen along two broader changes in society: first, the secularisation of family values and sexual mores, and second, the movement towards liberation for women and minorities in society. Both challenged traditional Christian values in Norway and were examples of the gradual decline of The Norwegian church’s influence.

In this paper, I will examine the Norwegian Church’s attitudes towards homosexuality and same sex relations in the period from 1930 to 1980. In this period, the issue of homosexuality moved from being subsumed under the umbrella of sexual ethics to an independent question the church had to settle. I will, in particular, focus on the role The New Testament had in shaping those attitudes and how contemporary understandings of homosexuality influenced NT interpretations. The paper is based on several sources such as exegetical commentaries, church statements, synod debates, and published theological discussions, with attention to how New Testament passages were cited and interpreted over time.

I will make two arguments. First, up until the 1970’s the church’s view on same sex relations was supported by law (these relations were criminalised till 1972) and psychiatry (which treated homosexuality as pathological). Therefore, theological arguments and references to the Bible were secondary to the legal and clinical arguments against same sex relations. Second, the decriminalisation and “de-pathologisation” of same sex relations meant that the church had to redefine its own theological views on homosexuality and same sex relations. It became necessary to properly figure out what the Bible and in particular the NT “actually” had to say about the matter. As such, the issue moved from a legal, political and clinical one to a “biblical” one.

Jorunn Økland, University of Oslo, “From Peritomé to Castration: The Realization of a Pauline Sarcasm in Early Christianity?”

A few places in the NT (Matt. 19:12 and various instances in Acts 8), biblical authors mention, hint, or refer explicitly to eunuchs. In the ancient world, the concept/term could refer to a royal/public office that required some level of male castration (with great room for variety and degree between different cultural/geographical contexts), and/or more generally the biological state of a male’s genitals.

In Galatians 5, Paul criticizes in unusually strong terms those Galatians who insist that (male) pagan converts to Christianity need to get circumcised in order to belong to the body of Christ. And it is towards the end of this argument that he exclaims “they might as well cut off

everything” (5,12, "Må de bare skjære av seg alt sammen, disse som sprer uro blant dere!" NO Bibel 2024). The American Standard Version here has translated “go beyond circumcision,” which reflects both the existence of a range of degrees between circumcision and "full castration", how the Greek term used here, "apokopto", was associated with castration in the Ancient Mediterranean world, and the difficulties of translating the passage in a meaningful way in a modern context.

On the occasion of 2025 marking the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicea, the proposed paper for NNTC 2026 will explore the possible spectrum of continuity that Paul himself suggests here, between his preoccupation with circumcision in many of his letters, and the prominent place that castration almost 300 years later received in the Nicea’s canons (Canon 1). In which ways, if any, could the preoccupation with male genitals in Paul and in early Christian theology and ministry (Nicea) be related?

## Chairs

All presenters are encouraged to bring their own laptops for their presentations, but you are also invited to send a copy of the slide show (if you use such) to the chair of your session beforehand, so that there is a backup solution if a computer and the AV system refuse to collaborate. This can be done at any time ahead of the session, and it is not a requirement but an offer.

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