

Schedule of Speakers, Papers, & Biographies

Artificial and Intelligent? Being Human In the Age of Artificial Intelligence

European Catholic Theological Society Irish Branch Conference: 9th–10th October, 2026

Friday 9th 7pm Room G16 Public Lecture with Prof Paul Scherz, University of Notre Dame

Reclaiming Human Agency in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Chair Prof Fáinche Ryan, President of European Society.

Saturday October 10th Registration from 9pm. Sessions begin at 9.30 sharp

Time	Room: G16 Chair Emmett O'Regan (Secretary)	Room: G6 Chair Sheila Keegan (Treasurer)
9.30am	Gaven Kerr	Caitríona Cunningham
10am	Adam Widera	Ryan McAleer
10.30am	Mark Birkett	Natalie Stumble
11am	Walter Maqoma	Ruairi Meyler

11.30–12pm G15 Break with refreshments

12pm–1pm G16 Plenary Session

Prof Paul Scherz: Tools and Virtues: AI Ethics and Social Practices

Chair Prof Cathriona Russell, President of the Irish Branch ECTS

Lunch 1.15 pm

Afternoon Sessions begin again at 2pm

Time	Room: G16 Chair Paul Clogher	Room: G6 Chair Natalie Strumble
2pm	Jane Barter	Chris West
2.30pm	Patrick Houlihan	Sheila Keegan
3pm	Emmett O'Regan	Onyewuchi Obirize
3.30pm	Sam Tranter Gregory	Isobel Dickson

For details on how to join the ESCT contact the Irish branch email address at esctirishbranch@gmail.com. €35 for full membership and €25 for students.

Keynote Speaker: Prof Paul Scherz

Paul Scherz is the Our Lady of Guadalupe Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and a Program Chair for the Notre Dame-IBM Tech Ethics Lab. Building on a dual training in genetics and moral theology, his work examines the intersection of theology, science, medicine, and technology. He is the author of *The Ethics of Precision Medicine* (Notre Dame), *Tomorrow's Troubles: Risk, Anxiety, and Prudence in an Age of Algorithmic Governance* (Georgetown), and *Science and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge). He is a member of the Vatican's Centre of Digital Culture's AI Research Group, for which he has co-edited *Encountering Artificial Intelligence* and *Redeeming Human Agency in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. He has previously taught at the Catholic University of America and the University of Virginia.

Friday the 9th at 7pm in G16 on *Reclaiming Human Agency in an Age of AI*

Saturday the 10th at 12pm on *Tools and Virtues: AI Ethics and Social Practices*.

Jane Barter: *Magnifica Humanitas*: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of AI

Jane Barter is Professor of Religion and Culture at the University of Winnipeg, where she teaches and writes in political theology, Christian thought, and social and cultural theory. She is the author of *Theopolitics and the Era of the Witness* (Routledge, 2025) and co-editor, with Doris Kieser, of *The Journey Presses On: Assessing Pope Francis' Visit and Apology to Indian Residential School Survivors in Canada* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2026). She also serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *T&T Clark Encyclopaedia of Christian Theology*. Her current research examines Catholic social teaching, artificial intelligence, digital capitalism, labour, and the political theology of technology.

Mark Birkett: A New Orthodoxy: Will Christian Transhumanism Reshape Christianity?

Mark Birkett is currently in a discernment process with the Church of England. He has a undergraduate degree in Philosophy, Religion, Ethics from the University of Birmingham (supervised by Jeremy Kidwell) and a Masters in Religious Studies from the University of Edinburgh (supervised by Jolyon Mitchell).

Caitríona Cunningham: Human Flourishing in a Digital Age: Reimagining Post-Primary Education through *Magnifica Humanitas*

Caitríona Cunningham is a full-time post-primary school teacher and PhD graduand, having recently defended her PhD thesis at Dublin City University. She is also a member of the Young Curatorium of the European Society for Catholic Theology. Her research focuses on environmental theology, ethics and policy, with a particular interest in the intersection of ecological responsibility and educational practice. Her thesis *From Theology to Policy: Eco-Theology and the Future of Post-Primary Education in Ireland*, examines how eco-theological principles can inform and shape educational policy in response to contemporary environmental challenges.

Isobel Dickson: Demystifying Artificial Intelligence: Reorienting Visions of AI and Humanity from the Mythic to the Material

Isobel Dickson is a current Dublin City University Ph.D candidate whose research explores the intersections of religion, technology, and science fiction narratives in shaping contemporary ideas about artificial intelligence and imagined AI futures. Isobel earned a Bachelor's degree in Religious Studies with an Interdisciplinary Focus in Art & Art History from Occidental College in Los Angeles, and an M.Phil in Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies from Trinity College Dublin.

Patrick Houlihan: Building a Civilization of Love during War and Peace: A Historical Theology of Humanity and Development from World War II to the Age of AI

Patrick Houlihan is Associate Professor in History and a Fellow at Trinity College Dublin. He was a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Oxford, now serving as an Alumni Ambassador in Ireland. He is also a consulting professor for the research group, "The Global Pontificate of Pius XII: Catholicism in a Divided World, 1945-1958." Patrick's first book, *Catholicism and the Great War: Religion and Everyday Life in Germany and Austria Hungary, 1914-1922* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), received the Fraenkel Prize. His most recent book is *Religious Humanitarianism during the World Wars, 1914-1945: Between Atheism and Messianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2024).

Sheila Keegan: Are we still searching for a Common Good?

Sheila Keegan is a doctoral candidate at TCD and director of the Lumen Dominican Centre. Her research examines the theological and pastoral commitments of Michael Hurley SJ, which placed reconciliation at the heart of his vision. As a pioneer of ecumenism, Hurley took initiatives and actions to build communities of difference. He was a consummate dialoguer, finding his true role in the changes of Vatican II, when the Church embraced the world instead of condemning it and opened itself to new philosophies and religions. Hurley represents a model of a Christian open to dialogue and to the goodness of people of all classes and creeds.

Gaven Kerr: Artificial and Human Agency

Gaven Kerr is a lecturer at St Patrick's Pontifical University Maynooth, academic registrar, and interim dean of philosophy. He has published with Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, and Editiones Scholasticae; in addition he has published in the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, *The Thomist*, *Nova et Vetera*, *Irish Theological Quarterly*. He is currently working on two monographs: (i) *The Metaphysics of the Resurrection*; (ii) *The Bounds of Realism*. Dr Kerr has delivered public lectures at Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, London, Rome, New Orleans.

Walter Maqoma: *Imago Dei* Anthropological Intelligence as Ecological Ground for the Development of Responsible Artificial Intelligence: An Ethical Approach to Human and Artificial Intelligence Dialectics

Walter Maqoma is a scholar of New Testament studies, specializing in Pauline Theology and Ethics, Theological Anthropology, and African contextual theology. He holds a PhD from the University of Pretoria (2015). He currently serves as the programme leader of B.Th. Programmes, a subject chair, and a senior lecturer in New Testament studies at North-West University. Prior to this appointment, he held the position of dean of undergraduate studies at the Baptist Theological College. His work explores the intersection of biblical ethics, identity formation, and African theological discourse. He is driven by a commitment to fostering ethical, biblically grounded communities.

Ryan McAleer: Dialogue Under Pressure: The Anthropological Challenge of Artificial Intelligence

Ryan McAleer is a FWO Postdoctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven and member of the Research Groups 'Theology and the Contemporary Context' and 'Enhancing Catholic School Identity'. Building upon his doctoral research (KU Leuven, 2026), McAleer continues to develop dialogue as a fundamental-theological category beyond merely functional approaches. His current research considers the category of dialogue for theological anthropology in the current digital age and the challenges presented by artificial intelligence. Recent publications include peer-reviewed articles in the *Irish Theological Quarterly*, *International Studies in Catholic Education*, and *Louvain Studies*.

Ruairi Meyler: Educating within the machine: the role of the humanities and theology in an AI world.

Ruairi Meyler is a PhD candidate in the Loyola Institute School of religion and peace studies at Trinity College Dublin. His PhD is titled "Perfect Society Ecclesiology and the Land of Saints and Scholars: The Ecclesiology of the Long Nineteenth Century and its Impact on Modern Irish Catholicism and the Contemporary Religious Landscape of Ireland."

He has contributed to a book project organized by the European society for Catholic Theology: *Being Young – Being Catholic – Being European*. his chapter is title Between aggiornamento and Catholic neo-traditionalism: Catholic neo-traditionalist theologies online and the challenges faced by young people in navigating cyber theologies.

Onyewuchi Obirize: Ireland's Enactment of Sustainable Development via Climate Change Mitigation in the Artificial Intelligence Era

Onyewuchi Obirize is a PhD candidate at the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies (Trinity College Dublin). His research focuses on relevant theologically-rooted sustainability enactment responses to climate change in Ireland. This interdisciplinary study investigates value-action gaps in the commitments to sustainability enactment in Ireland. The study also explores concrete responses from the majority Christian faith communities and other faith communities in their connections with Ireland's agri-produce sector.

He has qualifications in Geography, Applied Spirituality and Christian Theology.

Emmett O'Regan: Jerusalem or Babel? *Magnifica Humanitas* and Technological Millenarianism

Emmett O'Regan is an adjunct assistant professor at the Loyola Institute, Trinity College Dublin. He specialises in the area of Catholic ecclesiology and his work has been published in peer-review journals such as *Theological Studies* and *Nova et Vetera*. His piece for *Theological Studies* article "The Indefectibility of the Apostolic See: Was the Idea of a Heretical Pope Formally Excluded at the First Vatican Council?" has remained the top-viewed article on the journal metrics system since 2023. He has recently completed a monograph based on his doctoral thesis, titled *The Indefectibility of the Apostolic See: The Scope of Papal Authority and the Doctrinal Stability of the Ordinary Magisterium*, which is currently under peer-review at a major university press.

Natalie Strumble: Equipping the Domestic Church: AI Chatbots, Digital Literacy, and Parental Confidence in Sacramental Catechesis

Natalie Strumble is a Doctoral student at the DCU Institute of Education on the Doctor of Education program. She works for the Archdiocese of Dublin as the Faith Development Coordinator for Youth and Young Adults, where her work and research integrate, influence, and impact together. Her doctoral thesis is an inter-disciplinary work centred on contemporary and emerging digital technologies and its integration into parish-based catechesis. Her thesis title is: 'Exploring the Integration of an AI Chatbot in Parish-Based Catechesis: Supporting Parents in the Basics of Faith in the Archdiocese of Dublin'. She is the ESCT student representative for the Irish branch and a member of the Sub-Council for Youth and Evangelisation for the Irish Episcopal Conference.

Samuel Tranter: Mirror, mirror: AI, the likeness of God, and the labour of love

Samuel Tranter is McDonald Postdoctoral Fellow in Christian Ethics and Public Life in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford. At Oxford's McDonald Centre, he leads the research stream "Political Theology, Emerging Technologies, and the Common Life." Before Oxford, Sam was Academic Dean at St John's College Durham, and taught theology in Southeast Asia. His Durham PhD was published as *Oliver O'Donovan's Moral Theology* (T&T Clark, 2020), and he remains an Honorary Research Fellow of Durham's Department of Theology and Religion. Sam was an invited guest at the launch of Pope Leo's encyclical *Magnifica humanitas* and has written about the experience for *The Times*.

Christopher (Chris) West: Traumatic Alignment: Reading *Magnifica Humanitas* through AI Labour

Christopher (Chris) West is a PhD candidate in Divinity (Practical Theology) at the University of Aberdeen. His research explores the precarious nature of symbolic actions in worship and approaches occasional attenders as epistemically insightful. He examines deficit-model approaches to occasional attenders as a form of contributory injustice. Chris also serves as the Doctoral Student Representative for the British and Irish Association for Practical Theology. He lives in Armagh, where he is happily owned by his dogs.

Adam Widera: Beyond the Exclusively Human? Evolution and AI as Productive Disruptions to Theological Anthropology

Adam Widera is a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Vienna, working on “Synthetic Ethics as a Bridging Discipline between Evolutionary and Theological Ethics” under the supervision of Prof. Sigrid Müller. He holds degrees in Catholic Theology and in Chemistry and Catholic Religious Education from the University of Freiburg. Since 2016, he has taught Natural Sciences, Catholic Religious Education, and Ethics in Viennese high school. He also serves as a teaching practicum mentor at the University of Vienna and teaches Bioethics and Evolutionary Ethics in an international school partnership with Cheonan, South Korea.