

PERFORMANCE

DAS GLAUBENS- TRIBUNAL

THE TRIBUNAL OF FAITH

MILO RAU



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

29 – 31 May
Odeon

Milo Rau's theatrical discourse formats blend hard realism and social malleability to provide 'a forum that is far away from political trench warfare' (*SRF*). They are exercises in democratic practice as well as stage events. We've had the *Vienna Trials* ('The most exciting thing that theatre currently has on offer', *Die Welt*). We've had the *Congresses of Vienna* about the arts, power, abuse and cancel culture. Now it's time for an opulent *Tribunal of Faith* to investigate the misuse of religion and the illegitimate appropriation of spiritual practices. As has become a valued tradition of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen), this 'blessed sacrament of listening' will once more be an orgy of free speech, delving into the state of faith, power, spirituality, suppression, rites, art and capital.

Language German, English

 **Barrier-free access**

Venue Odeon

TIMETABLE

Friday, 29 May

7.30–10 pm, Opening Session

Duration approx. 2 hrs 30 mins

Saturday, 30 May

11 am–1.30 pm, Session 1

3–6 pm, Session 2

Duration approx. 7 hrs

Sunday, 31 May

11 am–1.30 pm, Session 3

3–4.30 pm, Final Meeting &

Decision Announcement

Duration approx. 5 hrs 30 mins

‘My house
is the house
of prayer:
but ye
have made it
a den of
thieves.’

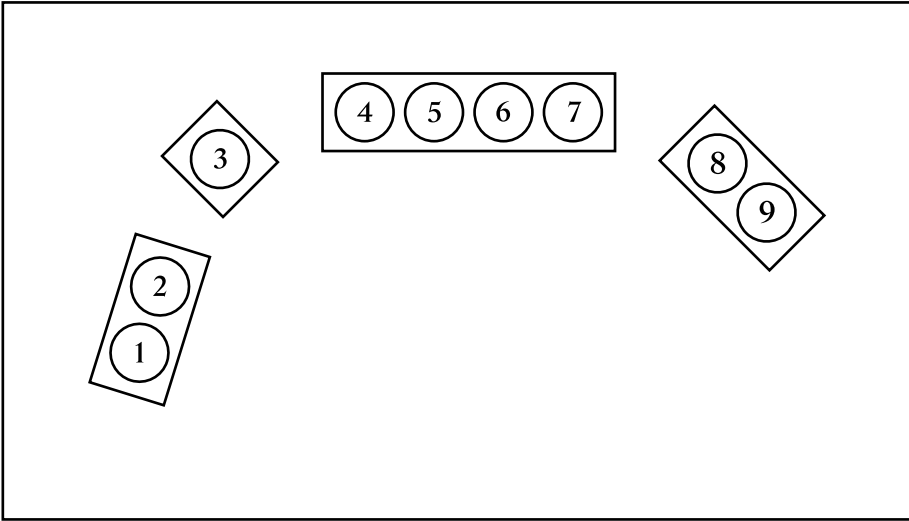
LUKE 19:46

Concept, director Milo Rau **Research, Casting, Dramaturgy** Mia Massmann, Robert Misik
Stage design Anton Lukas & Constanze Bieber **Live video** Moritz von Dungern
Video director Julian Besch **Direction assistance** Nastasia Griesse

Production Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

ILLUSTRATION



- 1 Scribe
- 2 Assistant
- 3 Lectern
- 4–7 Jury
- 8 Tribunal chair
- 9 Deputy chair

MEDIA COVERAGE

In cooperation with the daily newspaper *Der Standard*, we are offering all those who were unable to purchase tickets due to the exceptional demand during the advance sale the opportunity to watch the Tribunal weekend as a livestream at www.derstandard.at.

THE TRIBUNAL OF FAITH

Over half a century ago, the internationally renowned scholar Peter Berger predicted in the *New York Times* that '[by] the twenty-first century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture'. The assumption was that the process of modernisation would see the erosion of traditional ties, that religious communities would be hard hit – even finished – by the global triumph of technological advances, scientific reason, individualisation and enlightenment. It did not seem far-fetched. In fact, there was a time when his prediction was common sense. Today we can confirm that it did not exactly hit the mark.

Fundamentalist hotheads, deistic statesmen and religiously motivated terror continue to be part of the course in the twenty-first century. Religion is misused in the process. That is one hypothesis – and it calls for immediate challenge. Aren't the unconditioned and bigotry part of many belief systems? Conflicts or issues that are merely political are fought out in the language of religion. That language matters: If you cite religious and cultural conflicts for long enough, you'll conjure them up sooner or later.

Religious communities provide cohesion. Belief systems are always also a compendium of yearning for justice or

meaning on earth. They can be a source of beauty, a vocabulary of values and norms. Culture begins with cult.

Appropriation and abusive contexts are no one-way streets. Politics misuses religion, religion misuses politics. Art misuses religion, religion misuses art. Bigotry is used in right-wing campaigns. During the last parliamentary election campaign, the Austrian Freedom party used the slogan 'Thy will be done'. American tech giants appropriate religious vocabulary, dictators in Eastern Europe join hands with the state church. Religious symbols appear in popular culture, icons are transformed and reinterpreted. That which was supposed to provide solace and dignity in human life is, to cite Marx, being dipped into the 'icy waters' of capital. It is capitalised, stolen, appropriated, abused for belligerent propaganda and the creation of market value.

The Republic of Gods, as proclaimed by the Vienna Festival 2026, adopts the role of attorney for global communities of faith – and also takes a critical look at itself. What are Christian symbols such as crucifixes and frankincense, Indigenous practices like shamanism and spiritual practices like dreadlocks doing in popular culture and on the art market? Are artists allowed to loot everything? Where is the line between admissible use

and intrusive, neocolonial appropriation by what is essentially a capitalist religion of art and commerce? Why do we find formerly religious objects like Egyptian mummies, Benin bronzes and Aztec headdresses in European museums?

The Tribunal of Faith, this year's theatrical discourse debate format at the Vienna Festival, is dedicated to the wide variety of intricate and delicate processes of abuse, appropriation and exploitation of everything that is religious, cultic and spiritual.

THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF MAGA

These days, reality provides plenty of material. Take the recent fierce disagreement between Donald Trump and the pope. Pope Leo XIV said that the world was 'being ravaged by a handful of tyrants'. Trump and his people were incensed. Vice president J.D. Vance announced with a threatening undertone that the pope ought to 'be careful' when he speaks about theology. Vance, who converted to Catholicism seven years ago, must surely be a better source of information in questions of theology.

There is a serious background lurking behind the bizarre appearance of such events: significant parts of the reactionary MAGA movement are turning the Republicans into a fundamentalist religious sect. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth is a member of a fundamentalist Evangelical community. The tattoos on his body show Crusader symbols and the holy warrior slogan 'Deus Vult' – 'God wills it', a chant from the time of the

Crusades. We have grown used to these Evangelical movements throughout the decades.

A more recent occurrence is the return of Catholic fundamentalism in politics. 'Over the course of the last few years, a movement of the new subversive American right has discovered Catholicism – initially as a provocative attitude' (*Der Spiegel*). Being Catholic is different, it serves for distinction, but also has an air of mystery. Catholicism: the punk of today.

J.D. Vance belongs to this strange scene. Peter Thiel – billionaire, MAGA sponsor and tech bro – also appears as a proponent of a harsh political theology. For decades, Thiel has studied René Girard, whose book about *Violence and the Sacred* became a key work of philosophical-theological literature. Peter Thiel also likes reading the German Nazi jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt, who wrote on this topic during the twenties and thirties of the last century; his texts continue to be influential today. Schmitt's 'political theology' centres on the perpetuation of theological concepts in secular ideas of the present day. For example, he believed that the state of emergency was a secular equivalent of the miracle in theology. Thiel has recently begun giving frequent lectures both about the Antichrist and about the Katechon – the force that is allegedly able to restrain the diabolical. These thoughts are clearly influenced by Schmitt. Thiel is particularly taken with Apocalypticism. However, when Thiel voiced the possibility that the Antichrist

who was intent on establishing world domination might be embodied by Greta Thunberg during an interview with the New York Times, he rather ridiculed Schmitt's highbrow thinking. That all sounds confused, even funny to a certain point. But the picture that is emerging is less amusing: the MAGA people are investing a lot of energy into their efforts to put religion to the service of radical politics. A core motivation in all of that is to reshape Christianity into a cult of harshness in support of extreme neoliberalism and individualism. Peter Thiel recently spoke in a right-wing YouTube channel, postulating his opinion that Christianity went awry with the notion of loving your neighbour because that turned it towards the victims, the losers, the weak. That, he said, made the strong feel guilty – the original sin of Christianity. 'Toxic empathy' is a popular phrase in Thiel's circles.

Is all of that an entertaining folly? Thomas Assheuer recently wrote in the German weekly *Die Zeit* that he suspects that 'Religion is mercilessly being forged into a weapon'. An angry, belligerent Christianity is being used to incite the people. Despite the fact that in recent decades, a more humanist and emancipated interpretation of the Christian message had had the upper hand. The tradition of the Bible is a glossary of revolutionary and egalitarian ideals throughout human history, and it provides the language we need in the struggle against oppression. Resistance fighters like Martin Luther King have time and again made use of that. The biblical language of prophets and preachers provides powerful rhet-

oric for us to hurl at secular rulers: that famous 'truth to power'.

At the same time, religion inherently contains ire, aggression, punishment – especially so the monotheistic religions that have introduced a violent unconditionality into the sphere of religion. Many scholars, including the late professor of religious studies Jan Assmann, have pointed out that the exclusive notion of truth in monotheism has established a strict and uncompromising rhetoric. In it, salvation and destruction lie in close proximity. Such rhetoric conjures up a 'combination of piety and bloodlust' as well as 'combining militant masculinity with religious certainty' (*The Guardian*).

This madness is radiating out to the Christian milieus in Europe. Fundamentalists who would previously have hardly had a voice and would have remained in the shadows are gathering attention among the extreme right wing and in sensationalist media. They are infiltrating Catholic and Protestant groupings, coming to the fore as defenders of a Christian Europe. What used to be madness on the margins only a few years ago has gained confidence: neointegralist propagandists even dream of theocracies that no longer separate religious moral law and secular rulership.

THEOCRACY, BLASPHEMY AND LOOTED ART

Religion is not a prerequisite for people to do gruesome things, but its misuse is a great help. No large religion is untouched by that. Consider Jewish settlers in the West Bank using the language of fun-

damentalist bigotry, but also the racist Hindu nationalism in India. Consider the global rhetoric of radical Islamism that incites young people across the globe to join murderous bands like the Islamic State. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have established a theocracy. In Iran, an authoritarian theocratic dictatorship regularly quashes protest and emancipation movements with excessive brutality. Only in January this year, the blood month, various reports attested that up to thirty thousand people were killed by police, military and revolutionary guard. An entire nation was traumatised.

In a globalised world, the present day also throws up the struggles of conflicting values and battles with the not-so-past past of a (post)-colonial heritage. These conflicts may nowadays be less deadly, but they are still complicated enough.

Art borrows from the design vocabulary of religion as well as its imagery, it challenges religious piety, conventions and conformism. The history of art is richly endowed with 'art scandals': clashes between the avant-garde and the princes of the church. It is transgressive for religion to strive to censor art. Is it also transgressive when art offends religious sentiment because that is the easiest way to attract attention? Iconic objects and cultic or ritual items are stored in the museums of the Western world; they are described as 'messengers' of foreign communities when they are frequently more akin to witnesses of the past's looting mentality, today's ignorance and continuing proprietary thinking. Any attempt to resolve the various forms and

shapes of appropriation will be caught in a maze of complications that has no easy exit.

It is a busy and confused scene: a perfect fit for the Vienna Festival's *Tribunal of Faith*. The theatrical investigative format faces debates and listens to voices, experts, affected parties, protagonists and opinion makers as informants in three very different cases that all touch on the appropriation and the misuse of religion and cults.

A jury of experts questions the informants, guided through the proceedings by outstanding jurists who chair the investigation. This is not a show trial – it is a stage for the pro and contra, and orgy, nay: a blessed sacrament of listening.

OPENING SESSION

Friday, 29 May, 7.30–10 pm

The opening speeches will centre on the weekend's themes. Author Alice Hasters puts her focus on the perpetuation of colonial violence in our immediate environments. Frater Xaver, philosopher and Dominican monk from Vienna, highlights the treasury provided by religion for the arts' reference systems: there cannot be a juxtaposition between God and art, he says. Gérard Biard, editor-in-chief of *Charlie Hebdo*, underlines the absolute

autonomy of the arts and uncompromised freedom of opinion. Wolfgang Kaleck, human rights lawyer and chair of the tribunal, introduces the weekend's investigations. Michel Friedman, outspoken German jurist, defends secular reason against pious unconditionalities. He believes that they want to tackle only one thing: the doubt that lurks inside us all...

SESSION 1

HOLY SHITSTORM
Between Blasphemy and the
Freedom of the Arts
Saturday, 30 May, 11 am–1.30 pm

The arts and religious authorities have clashed time and again, just like secular reason and conventional dignitaries. Power and its effects play at least a great role as faith in that. The ties between state authorities on the one hand and churches and religious communities on the other intermittently grow closer and more distant. Actual and quasi state churches support secular autocrats. In theocracies, the religious leaders themselves become dictators. Where art ridicules faith, it also rebels against

its princes. Once religions lose standing (and therefore also secular power), such ridicule can become cheap and frivolous – itself a prancing echo of past enlightenment heroism.

While blasphemy sections in law seem obsolete at the moment, we ought to remain wary. Section 188 of the Austrian Criminal Code, the law that prohibits 'vilification of religious teachings', remains unchanged: 'Any person who publicly vilifies or mocks a person, or things that are objects of worship of a church or religious community in Austria, or religious teaching, or a custom or institution as permitted by law of such a church or religious community in cir-

cumstances in which the vilification or mocking is capable of causing reasonable nuisance, is liable to imprisonment of up to six months or a fine not exceeding 360 penalty units'. Any sufficient articulation of 'nuisance' will certainly cause nuisance. The law will bite. In Russia and Belarus, dissidents like Pussy Riot know that only too well. In Switzerland, the politician Sanija Ameti was found guilty of violating the freedom of beliefs because she had fired a shot at an image of Jesus. The ire and the hatred that she was exposed to even before the judgement had been passed recalled a witch hunt and destroyed her civic existence. In Austria, in turn, right-wing Catholic activists demanded that the exhibition *Du sollst Dir ein Bild machen* [You Shall Make for Yourself an Image] at Vienna's Künstlerhaus be boycotted.

Is everything permitted for art? And if so, does art have to do everything it is allowed to do? To art its freedom, to the faithful their unhurt feelings – how can

that be reconciled, aside of culture wars? The freedom of art, of criticism and emancipation: they can be attacked by state churches, by religious lobby groups and even by fundamentalist terrorists. One day it's the police and the prosecuting authority with the criminal code, another day the bigoted faithful with an AK-47. What right does religion have to the inviolability of its imagery, what claim do the faithful have to protect their delicate souls from offence, how tightly have the iconographies of art and religion long been interwoven? Art and cults have been fused for centuries. Can they even be genuinely told apart? Does secular radicality have to make peace with religion?

SESSION 2

PURLOINED GODDESSES

The Cult of Appropriation

Saturday, 30 May, 3–6 pm

The second Tribunal session is dedicated to literal appropriation, and to the wider sphere of all that is cultic. Western museums are filled with items, iconic objects and even human remains, includ-

ing mummies, which were either directly stolen or which are of dubious provenance. Many objects are not directly religious, but they do have a cultic or ritual role or have become iconic over the years as identification objects that may even be connected to the identity of communities or nations.

The session will open with a illustration,

turning to what may be the best-known icon of this kind: the Nefertiti Bust at Berlin's Neues Museum as property of the German Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz foundation. Nefertiti is not exactly a religious figure, but as the queen and wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten she does have a direct connection to Atenism, the religion that was long believed to be the origin of modern monotheism. For secular Egypt, she is an embodiment of the millennia-old Egyptian civilisation. For the Egyptian women's movement, she is an iconic poster girl. From the colonial viewpoint, she is a predecessor of 'Western' civilisation – not of African Egypt. She is the object of many different projections, each in itself an appropriation.

Nefertiti was discovered in 1912 during a large-scale excavation campaign led by the researcher Ludwig Borchardt. She was brought to Germany on the grounds of an 'agreement on the division of archaeological finds' that is considered controversial today. At the time, Egypt formed part of the Ottoman Empire – it was under foreign rule but at the periphery of that empire. The Nazis wanted to return the bust, but Hitler personally intervened. The Nefertiti Bust was certainly not actually stolen, but it may well have been purloined by trickery. It may have been appropriated on the basis of a colonial legal system and unequal distribution of power – a legal basis that cannot simply be perpetuated today. Egyptian activists and researchers therefore demand to 'Bring Nefertiti back home!'

Austrian museums also store cultic objects, human remains, mummies of Egyptian priests. There are many objects that may not be such hyper-icons as the Nefertiti Bust but which do raise questions of justice, restitution and reparations for colonial wrongs. Museums like to consider the objects on display as 'shared heritage' that ought to be accessible to all of humanity. However, such objects of shared heritage are hardly distributed equally. Nefertiti is a Berlin landmark, but there is no Albrecht Dürer drawing in Cairo and there are no sarcophagi or bones of any Habsburg emperors in museums of the global South. Should we send Empress Sisi to Cairo as a part of the 'shared heritage' of all of humanity?

SESSION 3

BAD RELIGION

In the Dungeons of the Almighty and His Theocracies

Sunday, 31 May, 11–1.30 pm

The alliance of secular, autocratic rule and religious authorities has come in a range of guises throughout the course of history. Its most radical form is the establishment of theocracies. In fundamentalist theocracies, the population is at the mercy of religious power. The suppression of civil society opposition in Iran reached a new peak this year. Protests resulted in a full-blown massacre, even after years during which movements like the Women. Life. Freedom rebellion had repeatedly been struck down. The third session of the Tribunal is dedicated to the Vienna Festival standing in solidarity with the Iranian people and in particular the struggle of Iranian women for equality and freedom.

All three Tribunal sessions have a feminist side. Activist groups like Pussy Riot and FEMEN are highlighted in the first session. Session two lends an ear to Egyptian feminists' demands to return the Nefertiti Bust, having turned the silhouette of this famous figure into an icon of female struggle and dignity. Session three turns to female Iranian artists and authors who have been abused and tortured and who had to leave their country in order to find safety.

The session also addresses the concept of theocracies itself. It scrutinises proponents of a 'Christian state' who want to establish a form of government that undertakes to adhere to 'religious moral law' here – that even connects them with the Mullahs in Iran. Evangelical fundamentalists and Catholic neointegralists in the USA describe the strict separation of state and church as a terrible mistake. We will also investigate the connections these groupings maintain with Silicon Valley's right-wing tech Fascism. How great is the danger posed to liberal democracy by these trends? We also ask: Doesn't a liberal democracy of all places have to permit the promotion of theocracies, too?

CLOSING SESSION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF DECISIONS

Sunday, 31 May 3–4.30 pm

After pointed closing statements by German philosopher and religion critic Michael Schmidt-Salomon and author Hamed Abdel-Samad, the members of the jury will draw their conclusions and provide answers to the core questions that emerged in the course of the investigations.

Sunday, 31 May, 9.30 am

Matinee for Alfred Noll

Alfred J. Noll, distinguished scholar of law, master of free speech and the careful choice of words – died much too young only a few weeks ago. Alfred Noll will be honoured in a Sunday matinee at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen), for which he was a member of the board for sadly only a few short months. Armin Thurnher has selected texts written by Alfred Noll and arranged them in thoughtful reference to each other. They will be read by friends and colleagues at Theater Odeon, the very place where Alfred Noll shone as the ‘prosecuting authority’ in three *Vienna Trials* two years ago.

Readings by

Andrea Casapicola, Walter Famler, Ernst A. Grandits, Gabriella Hauch, Thomas Kuscher, Milo Rau, Anna Sporrer, Kurt Stocker, Armin Thurnher and Martin Zrost.

THE TRIBUNAL OF FAITH STAFF

Hamed Abdel-Samad (member of the jury) is an Egyptian-German political scientist and journalist as well as a vocal critic of political Islam. He moved to Lebanon not least because of the acute danger he was exposed to in Germany. He has authored many books; *With God On Their Side. Die unheilvolle Allianz von Politik und Religion* [With God on Their Side. The Ominous Alliance of Politics and Religion; in German] will be published shortly.

Sheri Avraham (member of the jury) grew up in Israel and has been living in Vienna as an artist for many years. Sheri is a visual artist, curator, theatre maker, performer and a member of the Vienna Chamber of Labour.

Wolfgang Kaleck (chair of the tribunal) is a German lawyer. He specialises in criminal law and is a human rights lawyer. In 2007, he and other lawyers established the *European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights* (ECCHR) and he has since served as the centre's general secretary. His most recent publication is the book *Die Stärke des Rechts vs. das Recht des Stärkeren* [The Might of Rights v. The Right of the Mighty; in German].

Clara Maierhofer (deputy chair of the tribunal) is studying international law as well as economic and social sciences in Vienna. She has a keen interest in development economics and the statutory

consideration of matters of economy and currency in the context of international and comparative law.

Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger (member of the jury) was a member of the Benedictine Order and advocates for the ordination of women in the Catholic church. She was ordained to priesthood in a simulation of the ceremony in 2002 and as a bishop in 2003. The church does not recognise this sacrament and responded by excommunicating her.

Monika Mokre (member of the jury) is a political scientist and communication scientist with a focus on political participation, movement, migration, diversity. She is a democracy researcher and has been active in the Austrian Academy of Sciences for decades.

Marco Otoya (tribunal assistant) is an actor and theatre-maker who was born in Lima, Peru. He studied at Universidad Católica del Peru and other institutions. He has been living in Vienna since 2015. In recent months, he has, for example, been involved in the adaptation and production of *The Man Without Qualities* at Theater Arche.

SPEAKERS, INFORMANTS AND EXPERTS

Alice Hasters is a German journalist, author, audiobook speaker and pod-caster. She gained renown with her bestseller *Was weiße Menschen nicht über Rassismus hören wollen, aber wissen sollten* [What White People Don't Want to Hear About Racism but Ought to Know; in German]. She has been awarded with a series of journalism prices, including being named the Cultural Journalist of the Year, Kulturjournalistin des Jahres, in 2020.

Claudia Banz is an art historian, Romanic studies scholar, archaeologist and curator. Following on from a wide range of exhibitions and curatorships, she accepted the position as Director of Weltmuseum Wien (the former Ethnological Museum) in February 2025.

Gérard Biard is the editor-in-chief of the French political satire magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. He is a convinced advocate of secularism. He missed the terror attack on his magazine by chance, as he happened to be at a conference in London at the time.

Sebastian Conrad is a German historian. He focuses on colonial history, global history and the history of historiography. Conrad teaches at the Freie Universität in Berlin. His book *Die Königin. Nofretetes globale Karriere* [The Queen. Nefertiti's Global Career; in German] was published in 2024.

Kosar Eftekhari is an Iranian actor and activist. She was shot in the eye and seriously injured by a security officer in the course of the Women. Life. Freedom protests in Teheran in 2022. She fled to Germany and is currently living in exile in Berlin.

Saeedeh Fathi is an Iranian sports journalist and activist. She was the first woman in the country to be the editor-in-chief of a sports magazine. She was imprisoned in the course of the Women. Life. Freedom demonstrations and had to endure two months in the notorious Evin prison. She now lives in Vienna and makes contributions to the newspaper *Der Standard*.

Freda Fiala is a cultural scientist. She researches the interlocking relationships between Central Europe and the Asia-Pacific, focussing on museums and cultural diplomacy. Setting out from East Asia Studies/Sinology and Theatre and Cultural Studies, her work was shaped by several years spent in Aotearoa New Zealand, Hong Kong and Taiwan. She is currently working for the ERC project OLFAC at Linz University of the Arts and lives in Vienna.

Michel Friedman is a German-French journalist, author, moderator, jurist, philosopher and former politician in the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) as well as a former member of

the board of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. His most recent book publication is *Mensch! Liebeserklärung eines verzweifelten Demokraten* [Mensch! A Desperate Democrat's Love Letter; in German].

Monica Hanna is an Egyptian studies scholar and archaeologist who lives in Cairo and Baghdad. She is an activist who advocates for the return of objects purloined from Egypt. She has an important voice in the Egyptian women's movement and is a co-initiator of the 'Bring Nefertiti back home!' campaign.

Shoura Zehetner-Hashemi is the managing director of Amnesty International Austria, a jurist and human rights activist. Her own background is Iranian and she documents the events and quashing of protest movements in her country of origin.

Mina Khani is an Iranian journalist and artist. She was born in Tehran and has been living in Germany for twenty years. She writes about the political situation related to Iran from a feminist perspective. As an artist, she works in dance, choreography and other fields.

Andreas Kemper is a German journalist and sociologist. His main focus is research on anti-democratic networks, authoritarian ideologies and neo-liberal power structures. Among others, he addresses the neointegralist movement in his podcast *Tagebuch zum Neoaristokratismus* [Diary of Neo-Aristocratism; in German].

Jan Ledóchowski advocates Christian values in politics. He is active in the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and chair of the Meldestelle Christenschutz which takes a stance against polemics or transgressions directed against faithful Christians. As such, he protested against the exhibition *Du sollst Dir ein Bild machen* at Vienna's Künstlerhaus.

Günther Oberhollenzer is an Italian author, art historian and curator. He has been artistic director of the Künstlerhaus association since 2022. He was one of the co-curators of the exhibition *Du sollst Dir ein Bild machen* at Künstlerhaus.

Maria Sagmeister studied law and art history in Vienna and Rotterdam. Her research interests and specialisms are in philosophy of law, labour and social law as well as legal gender studies. She attained her PhD with distinction at the University of Vienna's Institute for Philosophy of Law in 2020.

Inna Shevchenko is a Ukrainian activist and one of the leading personalities in the protest movement FEMEN. She gained attention, among others, when she felled a wooden cross in Kyiv in 2012 in solidarity with the Russian band Pussy Riot. She has been living in France and Austria since 2013 as a politically persecuted person. Her documentary film *Girls & Gods* looked into the relationship between feminism and faith as well as the institution of the church as an instrument of power.

Michael Schmidt-Salomon is a German philosopher, author as well as co-founder and board speaker of the Giordano-Bruno-Stiftung, a foundation that by its own description is dedicated to humanist-evolutionary thought. He is therefore generally considered a critic of religion in the tradition of enlightenment and free-thinking movements.

Friederike Seyfried is a German Egyptologist. She has, among others, directed archaeological digs, has held various positions at universities and has been the director of Ägyptisches Museum in Berlin since 2009.

Laurent Sourisseau, known by his pseudonym Riss, is a French cartoonist, caricaturist and author for the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. He was injured during the severe attack on the magazine's offices but survived and rebuilt the satirical magazine again after most of his team had been murdered.

Jan Juhani Steinmann is a theologian, philosopher and literary scientist. He is from Bern and lives in Vienna. He is a poet and novelist who advocates for a Christian state that overcomes the postulated separation of state and religion.

Frater Xaver is a German Dominican monk, philosopher and theologian. He teaches at the Chair for Dogmatics and Ecumenic Theology in Munich as a member of academic staff and is also active in Vienna, where he lives. He is also known for his YouTube appearance as catholicistic.

PROGRAMME

FRIDAY, 29 MAY

7.30–10 pm
OPENING SESSION

Opening Speeches:

- Milo Rau
- Wolfgang Kaleck
- Alice Hasters
- Frater Xaver
- Gérard Biard
- Michel Friedman

SATURDAY, 30 MAY

11 am–1.30 pm
SESSION 1

HOLY SHITSTORM Between Blasphemy and the Freedom of the Arts

- Maria Sagmeister
- Inna Shevchenko
- Jan Ledóchowski
- Laurent Sourisseau (Riss)
- NN
- Günther Oberhollenzer

3–6 pm
SESSION 2

PURLOINED GODDESSES The Cult of Appropriation

- Monica Hanna
- Sebastian Conrad
- Friederike Seyfried
- Claudia Banz
- Freda Fiala
- Amber Aranui

SUNDAY, 31 MAY

11 am–1.30 pm
SESSION 3

BAD RELIGION

In the Dungeons of the Almighty and His Theocracies

- Kosar Eftekhari
- Mina Khani
- Saeedeh Fathi
- Jan Juhani Steinmann
- Andreas Kemper
- Shoura Zehetner-Hashemi

3–4.30 pm
CLOSING SESSION

Closing Speeches:

- Michael Schmidt-Salomon
- Hamed Abdel-Samad
- Jury Decision
- Closing Address Wolfgang Kaleck

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15 MAY –
21 JUNE 2026

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