INTERNATIONAL TRANSDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

TRUST & SOCIETY

Catholic University of Central Africa
25 to 27 November 2026

With the support of the International Federation of Catholic Universities

CALL FOR PAPERS

Within the framework of "Trust & Society—The Global Network on Trust," the *Faculty of Theology* and the *Faculty of Social Sciences and Management* of the *Catholic University of Central Africa* (UCAC), in collaboration with the *Luxembourg School of Religion & Society* and the *Pontifical Academy of Theology*, are organizing an international transdisciplinary conference on the theme "Trust & Society", to be held in Yaoundé from 25 to 27 November 2026.

Context and Issues

Trust constitutes a fundamental basis of all social life. Yet, its crisis is constantly denounced today, alongside calls for its reconstruction. Over several decades, *trust studies* have experienced remarkable growth within the social sciences. However, this field of research remains largely shaped by Western contexts and has only rarely integrated in a substantial way the specific resources of theological reflection and of the African continent.

This conference considers it essential to examine the phenomenon of trust and its idea in its full conceptual diversity. It proceeds from the assumption that trust is not only present where the term itself is explicitly used.

It raises the question of the extent to which the diagnosis of a "crisis of trust" is justified: What allows such a diagnosis to be made (or not)? To what extent does it apply—or not? On what grounds is this diagnosis based? Are we dealing with a "crisis of trust," or rather with other factors that the discourse on such a crisis may obscure?

The conference seeks to contribute to a renewed understanding of trust resulting from the mutual enrichment of various forms of theological and non-theological investigations, particularly from the social sciences in relation to the experience of practitioners, as required by pontifical documents, namely the Preamble of the *Apostolic Constitution Veritatis gaudium* (27 December 2017) and the *Motu proprio Ad theologiam promovendam* (1st November 2023).

To this end, it aims to explore the anthropological, social, cultural, religious, and spiritual foundations of trust, as well as the conditions for its presence and—if possible—its reconstruction in societies marked by multiple crises.

Furthermore, must trust always prevail? To what extent is mistrust (distrust, absence of trust) an important factor for navigating life? Is the creation of trust always an absolute imperative? How is a "healthy mistrust" grounded? What challenges traditional points of reference?

A Transdisciplinary Approach to Trust

This conference builds upon the research laboratory "Toward a Theology of Trust", developed within the Trust & Society project between researchers from UCAC and LSRS, as well as the laboratory "Trust in African Contexts." The objective of the laboratory dedicated to a specifically theological approach to trust was to elaborate a concept of trust emerging from a critical, methodologically reflective, and "contemplative" integration of the contributions of the various theological disciplines throughout the research process.

Such an approach goes beyond a mere multidisciplinary juxtaposition; it exceeds even interdisciplinary dialogue. It seeks a genuinely transdisciplinary dynamic, as called for in the *Motu proprio Ad theologiam promovendam* (§ 5): "**Transdisciplinarity** must be understood as the **integration** and **fermentation of all knowledge within the space of Light and Life offered by the Wisdom that flows from God's Revelation**" (*Apostolic Constitution Veritatis gaudium*, Preamble, 4c)."

It is not a matter of remaining within inherited language, but of undertaking the same task as those who have renewed theological studies. In his Address to participants in a seminar organized by the Pontifical Academy of Theology on 13 September 2025, Pope Leo XIV emphasizes the sapiential dimension capable of producing synthesis, citing as examples Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Blessed Antonio Rosmini.

Theologians must "be capable of employing new categories developed by other forms of knowledge in order to penetrate and communicate the truths of faith and to transmit the teaching of Jesus in today's languages, with originality and critical awareness" (*Ad theologiam promovendam*, § 5). How, then, should "trust"—a concept developed within certain human sciences—be rethought in light of the mission entrusted to theologians of our time?

Trust has become not only a subject of research but also a "product" marketed by consulting firms, which develop programs aimed at "creating," "building," or "restoring" trust. Such an approach assumes that trust is something that human beings can "produce." It is legitimate to question whether this is indeed the case and to formulate critical hypotheses: What if trust does not belong to the order of "doing" but rather to that of "being," of gift, or of virtue? Or if it belongs not to action but to contemplation, thus eluding the idea that everything constitutes a techno-*logical* "problem" whose components can be defined in order to devise a "solution"—an attitude that might itself be at the origin of a loss of trust?

Scripture and Tradition do not merely offer alternative perspectives on life, just as the wisdom of African ancestors does; they are inscribed within practices that shape the relationships between the human person, the world to which they belong, and God. This international conference seeks to highlight these perspectives and practices. In doing so, it aims to promote an approach capable of conceiving trust as an anthropological, social, ethical, religious, and theological reality, while taking into account the diversity of cultural and historical contexts.

Guidelines for Contributions

The conference will give priority to explicitly transdisciplinary contributions that seek to illuminate the foundations of trust within society. The impact of social media and artificial intelligence will be appropriately integrated into these approaches. It is essential not merely to advocate for transdisciplinarity but to practice it concretely in addressing both the challenges and the opportunities it entails.

Particularly welcome are:

- Contextual approaches attentive to specific social, cultural, and religious realities (e.g., linguistic and semantic studies of trust in local languages; analyses of proverbial, narrative, artistic, ritual, and symbolic expressions)
- Properly theological works, especially those engaging major authors of the Tradition and those exploring the relationship between trust and contemplation
- Research resulting from collaboration between theologians and social scientists

- Studies arising from exchanges between researchers (theologians and others) and practitioners (pastoral agents, educators, institutional leaders, social actors)
- Contributions by scholars capable of mobilizing multiple disciplines within an integrative perspective
- Analyses placing theological reflection in dialogue with social experiences of rebuilding trust
- Works highlighting the challenges, difficulties, and necessity (intellectual, institutional, epistemological, etc.) of a transdisciplinary approach (including a meta-perspective)

Scientific Objectives

The conference pursues the following objectives:

- To deepen the anthropological and specifically theological understanding of trust
- To explore the social and institutional dynamics of trust, distrust, and mistrust
- To analyze the possibilities of "processes of rebuilding trust" in contexts of crisis or collective trauma
- To promote a transdisciplinary methodology in the study of complex social phenomena
- To contribute to the emergence of an international research network on trust

Submission Guidelines

Proposals must include:

- A title
- An abstract of 300 to 400 words maximum
- 3 to 5 keywords
- A brief biographical note (max. 100 words)

Proposals must clearly highlight the transdisciplinary dimension of the proposed approach. Submissions may be made in French or English.

Doctoral candidates are encouraged to submit proposals. A dedicated session will be organized for them.

Timeline

- Abstract submission deadline: 30 June 2026

- Notification of acceptance: 31 July 2026
- Conference: 25–27 November 2026

Publication

A selection of contributions will be published following peer review. Deadline for submission of full papers: 15 January 2027.

Organizing Committee

- Prof. Jean Ehret, LSRS, PATh
- Prof. Yvon Elenga, UCAC
- Prof. François Ndzana, UCAC
- Dr. Armel Otabela, Trust & Society
- H.E. Mgr Antonio Staglianò, PATh

Contact and Submission

Proposals should be sent to: *office@trustandsociety.net*

Subject line: *Trust & Society Conference – Paper Proposal*