



RELIGION AND POLITICS

THE CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE

The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation” at the University of Münster has been investigating the complex relationship between religion and politics across epochs and cultures since 2007. The around 140 researchers from 10 countries and more than 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences are particularly concerned with the dynamics of religion from antiquity to the present. They analyze what makes religion an engine of political and social change, and in particular the paradox that religions activate their potential for innovation precisely by drawing on their traditions.

The Cluster of Excellence is the largest of its kind in Germany and, of the Clusters of Excellence, the only one to deal with the issue of religion. It will receive funding of 31 million euros from 2019 to 2025. The Cluster comprises approximately 80 research projects that concentrate on the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and on their polytheistic precursors. The focus of interest is on Europe and the Mediterranean region, as well as on their entanglements with the Near East, Africa, and North and Latin America.

The University of Münster has become through the Cluster of Excellence a nationally and internationally outstanding location for interdisciplinary research on religion. The “Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professorship for Religion and Politics” brings innovative stimuli from international research to Münster and deepens the interdisciplinary discussion at the Cluster of Excellence. An internationally unique “Campus of Religions” will bring together Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic theology, as well as institutions at the University that take a non-denominational perspective on religion.

The Cluster of Excellence is marked by a high degree of interdisciplinarity and methodological diversity. The following disciplines are involved in the Cluster: history, law and political science, sociology of religion and religious studies, Catholic, Protestant, Christian-Orthodox and Islamic theology, Jewish studies, Arabic and Islamic studies, philosophy and psychology, classical and modern philology, as well as art history, Assyriology, archaeology, Egyptology, Byzantine studies, and ethnology.





DYNAMICS OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

Religions have always been an engine of political and social change – both in the past and in the present. The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” investigates these dynamics of religion and politics from a historical, comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. In doing so, we focus on the intrinsic power of religion in different political and social contexts.

The dynamics of religion always appear when religions accelerate and intensify, distract and divert, or decelerate and counterbalance, social processes and conflicts. The Cluster of Excellence draws attention to the active potential that religions have in the social conflicts of the past and present, and identifies the driving forces, systems of logic and typical patterns of change.

The history of religion is full of charismatic upheavals, new spiritual beginnings, innovative schisms and reformations, which have all presented themselves as something new even while claiming to return to their origins. Religions are viewed as traditional defenders of the old against the dynamic changes

in their environment, but they also always contain considerable potential for renewal precisely in their reference back to the tradition.

In its analysis of the relationship between religion and politics and its historically changing dynamics, the Cluster of Excellence assumes that religion and politics cannot always be clearly distinguished from one another. Rather, their borders are always being renegotiated. Nonetheless, the distinction between religion and politics is very well suited to denoting the central poles of social conflict for the text-based religions of the ancient Near East, Greek and Roman antiquity, Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

The investigation of religious dynamics is carried out in 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. This results in a unique combination of historical and contemporary questions, theoretical and empirical perspectives, normative and descriptive approaches, as well as denominational and non-denominational research on religion.

RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The 140 researchers in the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” deal in approximately 80 individual projects with the “dynamics of religion and politics”. The complex object of research is divided into three fields of research: “Transcultural entanglements and disentanglements”, “Religious diversity and legal-political unity”, and “Criticism of religion and apologetics”.

Running across these fields of research are theory platforms, where we share our perspectives on theories of conflict, emotionality and mediality, and social inequality and differentiation.

In addition, there are flexible Research Clouds, which bring together where required ideas from the different fields of research and theory platforms, including overarching themes such as ambiguity and decision-making, migration and diaspora, and theological doctrine and lived religiosity. We research religiously authoritative texts from Judaism, Christianity and Islam in Digital Humanities projects. To this end, the University of Münster has established a Center for Digital Humanities.

The field of research “Transcultural entanglements and disentanglements” examines on the one hand how the entanglement of religions with one another contributes to their renewal, and on the other how religions retreat to their traditions in order to assert themselves against competing claims.

The field of research “Religious diversity and legal-political unity” explores how societies in the past and present deal with growing religious diversity and the conflicts that arise from it. This also includes the issue of how ideological plurality and the resulting conflicts are dealt with legally and politically.

The field of research “Criticism of religion and apologetics” examines a central aspect of processes of religious change. It is precisely how religion itself deals with criticism that determines its ability to change. Conversely, religious apologetics by no means only preserves tradition, but can also have a transformative dynamic.



BOARDS AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Around 140 researchers from more than 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences at the University of Münster conduct research in the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”. Its central decision-making body is the General Assembly, which makes decisions on all issues of fundamental importance to the Cluster of Excellence.

The General Assembly comprises all Principal Investigators as well as other project leaders and members of the Graduate School. Responsibility for academic and strategic planning in the Cluster lies with the Board of Directors. The Speaker represents the Cluster both within and outside the University.

The Commission for Equal Opportunities and Diversity develops measures to promote equal opportunities and acts as a point of contact should conflicts arise.

The Cluster of Excellence is committed to the equality of all people regardless of origin, gender and age, religious and other worldviews, sexual orientation, and physical and psychological disability.

The Academic Advisory Board, consisting of internationally renowned scholars representing the most important disciplines in the Cluster of Excellence, supports the research conducted in the Cluster, and makes recommendations for further work. The Management of the Cluster of Excellence is responsible for coordinating the academic activities of the Cluster, and for providing practical organizational support. The Centre for Research Communication disseminates the Cluster’s research from the humanities and social sciences to the general public.





EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS

In order to promote early-career researchers and to unite research and teaching, the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” runs a Graduate School with an interdisciplinary doctoral programme and special support for postdocs. This enables early-career researchers from the humanities and social sciences to participate independently in the interdisciplinary research of the Cluster of Excellence.

The Graduate School offers a focused and structured programme on an issue from the field of tension between religion and politics as part of its interdisciplinary doctoral programme. Doctoral students are supervised by a team of two professors and a doctoral mentor from the Cluster.

During their doctoral studies, students can attend events that prepare them for different career paths both within and outside academia. Those leaving the Graduate School have entered a wide range of careers, such as at other universities and research institutes, in publishing houses, schools, government ministries, church institutions, and libraries.

The Cluster of Excellence provides optimal working conditions for postdoctoral researchers to pursue their own research and to gain further academic qualifications. As independent project leaders, they have the same status in their research as professors and thus plenty of autonomy for their research projects.

RESEARCH TRANSFER

The Cluster of Excellence investigates the question of what makes religion an engine of political and social change, and attaches great importance to the transfer of its research findings to society. The Centre for Research Communication is the first point of contact for all those interested in the Cluster of Excellence. The Centre uses formats specific to a particular theme to disseminate research from the humanities and social sciences to a large number of target groups in society. It promotes dialogue between researchers and representatives from the media, politics, culture, churches, and religious communities, as well as with the general public.

Scholars in the Cluster of Excellence seek to engage the general public in dialogue on pressing issues of the future, and contribute their expertise, be it in the form of sociological and psychological insights on migration and integration in Europe, analyses from political and legal theory on religious policy, or theological and historical explorations of the relationship between religion, violence and gender.

The centrepiece of the Cluster of Excellence's research transfer is its work in national and international media and social media, for which the Centre for Research Communication identifies the social relevance of the research findings of the humanities and social sciences, and disseminates them in media-appropriate texts, pictures, audios and videos.

A further focus of research transfer is consulting politicians and stakeholders from religious or ideological communities and non-governmental organizations. The Centre also organizes exhibitions, film series, concerts, dialogue with citizens and educational materials, panel discussions and debates with renowned guests from academia, politics, religions, art and culture. These are often coordinated in cooperation with institutions outside the University such as museums, publishing houses, trusts, educational institutions, schools of journalism, cinemas, choirs and schools.



CAMPUS OF RELIGIONS

The University of Münster has become through the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” an internationally outstanding location for interdisciplinary research on religion. Against this background, an internationally unique “Campus of Religions” will bring together Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic theology, as well as University institutions that take a non-denominational perspective on religion, thereby promoting interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary academic exchange.

Located in the city of the Peace of Westphalia, the Campus is designed to be a venue for exchange between leading national and international representatives from academic, political, religious and ideological communities and non-governmental organisations, the media, culture and the arts. This is intended to promote understanding in the conflict-laden field of “religion and politics”.

Unique at the University of Münster are the size and diversity of disciplines, methods, cultures and epochs in research on religion. The University has created sustainable structures in order to safeguard this diversity of research and international exchange. Several new research centres and institutions, professorial chairs and third-party funding associations have emerged from the Cluster of Excellence in recent years.

The Campus of Religions will bring together diverse institutions for the research into religion – which have so far been scattered throughout the city of Münster – under one roof in a large, centrally located building complex with a total of around 4,000 students. The new building will house employment for more than 430 researchers and staff. With its 560,000 books from all faiths, the library will be one of the largest libraries in the world for research on religion.



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