

Press release

“Religious dynamics continue to shape our society in significant ways”

Researcher on religion: Focusing on the number of people leaving the church and on declining attendance at church services overlooks how churches and religiosity have shifted into the political domain – Conference organized by the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” and the DFG research group “Being Catholic in the FRG”

Münster, 1 March 2022 (exc) An interdisciplinary conference organized by the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” and the DFG research group “Being Catholic in the FRG” will deal next week with the dynamics of religion in political processes. “Christianity is currently suffering a real loss of importance in Western Europe, but not in America and Eastern Europe”, says church historian Prof. Dr. Andreas Holzem. “The churches are seen as a haven of traditionalism, a view reinforced by the crisis of authority triggered by the slow process of dealing with sexual abuse”. Despite the flow of people currently leaving the church, though, we should not overlook the religious dynamics that continue to shape politics and society today. “Church members have increasingly turned away from the authorities of the established church since the 1960s, while at the same time understanding their Christianity in an increasingly political way”.

There are many examples of how the decline of classical piety is triggering new religious dynamics, says Holzem. “Attendance at church services has been falling for decades, but many church members see themselves as committed to society and are involved in climate protection or social justice, for example”. Such phenomena give rise to many research questions, such as how new rituals emerge when religious action is understood less and less as the performance of worship and more as social action.

The conference “Dynamics of the religious in political processes” from 8 to 10 March is intended to expand interdisciplinary discussion in research on religion. Its organizers are the theologians Prof. Dr. Andreas Holzem from the research group, and Prof. Dr. Michael Seewald from the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”, which in its current funding phase is focusing in particular on “Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation”, with researchers ranging across epochs to analyze the factors that make religion a motor of social change. The DFG research group “Being Catholic in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1965-1989/90” analyzes the renewal of forms and practices of religious faith in the context of German social history from the mid-1960s to 1989, a period marked by enormous change in the religious-cultural domain.

Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation

The conference panel “Secularization or Transformation?” will explore how models can be used to depict religious change in modern societies, and discuss the constructs “secularization” and “transformation”. The panel “Theology as Social Practice” will focus on where reflecting on religion and religious practices intervenes in everyday social life, and on the dynamics and tensions that this triggers. The panel “Religion and Politics” will focus on the networking of religious actors with other political and social groups, and explore differences between denominations and religions in politics. The conference will also deal under the title “Emotions – Gender – Law – Generation” with methodological matters with regard to research on religion. (sca/vvm)

Caption: Prof. Dr. Andreas Holzem (Photo: Annette Cardenale), Prof. Dr. Michael Seewald (Photo: private)

DFG research group “Being Catholic in the Federal Republic of Germany”

The research group analyzes the renewal of forms and practices of religious faith in the context of German social history from the mid-1960s (Second Vatican Council, with the key year of 1968) to 1989 (German reunification), a period marked by monumental changes that its contemporaries were already sensitive to. This is the research group’s starting-point: How did “being Catholic” specifically shape the post-modern period after the 1960s/70s? The research group is concerned here not with the internal history of a social milieu, but with the inscription of religious-cultural dynamics in contemporary history.