

WESTFÄLISCHE
WILHELMS-UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNSTER

CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE RELIGION AND POLITICS

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Religion und Politik
EXZELLENZCLUSTER | WWU MÜNSTER



› Editorial

Dear readers,

In 2007, the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” was established at the University of Münster. Some 200 academics from 20 disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences and from eleven countries deal with the sensitive relationship of religion and politics, which has shaped all ages and cultures.

The approx. 100 research projects range from Antiquity to the present and from Latin America and Europe to the Arab and the Asian world. The federal government and the state governments support the Münster undertaking within the scope of the Excellence Initiative with 37 million Euros until 2012. The following pages will introduce you to Germany’s largest research association on religions, which was founded in the city of the Peace of Westphalia.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Gerd Althoff

Speaker of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”



› Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

The relationship of religion and politics has been a complex one in every age and every culture. It is thus closely connected to many elementary questions posed by the humanities and the social sciences. The approx. 200 academics of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” deal with this issue in 60 research projects and 45 Ph.D. projects, participating across epochs and disciplines. The Cluster is nationally the largest research association of its kind and of the 37 Clusters of Excellence in Germany, it is the only one to deal with religions.

Researchers in history, Catholic and Protestant as well as Muslim theology, Jewish studies, law, ethnology, archaeology, political science, sociology of religion as well as literary scholars, social scientists and scholars of Islam are participating. In the process, additional professorships and numerous posts for junior academics have been provided in Münster.

The members of the Cluster of Excellence deal with fundamental research and at the same time seek to provide answers to pressing questions of the future in a globalised society. Organised in four thematic pillars, they study the potentials for violence, claims to truth, rituals and normative influences of religions. The projects are, for example, “Religion and Biopolitics”, “Another History of Islam”, “Initiation – Circumcision – Identity”, “The Burning and the Censorship

of Books in Late Medieval England” or “Analyses of the Rhetoric of Violence in Late Antiquity”.

A Graduate School with currently 45 doctoral students and a Centre for Research Communication, advancing the dialogue with the media and the public, are part of the Cluster of Excellence. Utmost importance is attached to the exchange with international academics, who are regular visitors at the Cluster. Moreover, the concept also includes equality between male and female academics, family-friendly working conditions, and relieving the members of teaching activities in order to create ample space for research.



› Academic Plan

In a seemingly secularised world, a certain “return of the gods” has been registered for some time. Mass media all over the world report on religious phenomena – from esoteric private religions to papal media events, religiously charged ethics debates and extremist violence. The age of globalisation has called into question familiar European facts formerly thought to be self-evident: Fundamentalists of differing influences, whether Islamic or evangelical, fight the modern age and challenge the existence of the secular state. Religion again becomes the field of political and social struggles for power and interpretation.

This requires new scientific approaches, and the Cluster of Excellence brings together the existing capabilities of numerous disciplines and compares epochs and cultures in intensive scientific exchange. In doing so, it builds on positive experiences with scientific research approaches to culture at the WWU Münster. Various types of events serve this purpose: public lecture series and discussion forums in cooperation with institutions such as the city and diocese of Münster, symposia, colloquiums, workshops, study groups, seminars and master classes of the Graduate School as well as film series in cinemas, concerts and exhibitions.

To realign the relationship of religion and politics and to revise old perceptions, the academics reconsider comparative

approaches to history as well as religion and they question concepts and methods that remain limited to the Christian occident. They are convinced that only a comparison with the unfamiliarity of other periods and cultures can create the appropriate distance as to what has been taken for granted from a modern occidental perspective.

The area of investigation extends from pagan, Jewish and Christian Antiquity and the Jewish, Christian and Islamic Middle Ages to the religious pluralisation in the early modern period and the present. A more precise understanding of these pre-modern and modern structures will also broaden the horizon for evaluating present-day problems resulting from the conflicting interests of religion and politics. The academics wish to initiate dialogue about such current topics with a broader public. The Centre for Research Communication promotes this dialogue.



› Fields of Research



› Field of Research A: Normativity

All periods and cultures are shaped by different norms. The Cluster of Excellence focuses on the different secular and theological concepts of normativity and their interrelation. The scholars are concerned with the religious roots of the secular state and with the differences between the norms of different periods, social orders and religious communities. Particular attention is paid to the question of how different cultures deal with coexisting contradictory norms. Projects such as “Pluralism Capacities of Religions and Inter-Faith Theology”, “Local Elites between Denomination-Bound Citizens’ Commitment and Party Politics” or “Legal Conflicts and Public Controversy about Religion in Germany in International Comparison” belong to research area A.

› Field of Research B: Staging

Religious and political systems produced numerous rituals, cults and ceremonies. Their spiritual and secular forms can rarely be isolated from one another. The researchers question the outward form, the symbolism and the potential of such acts of staging for the political, social and religious system from Antiquity to the present. Literary works in which authors stage themselves as religious or political authorities will also play a role here. Projects such as “Authorship as Scandal”, “Political Religion, Utopia and Violence in the 19th and 20th Century”, “Religion And ‘Civil Religion’ in US-American Patriotic Holidays”, and “Legitimacy and Legitimation of Political Rulership in Late Medieval and Modern City Processions” are part of the research area B.

› Field of Research C: Integrative Procedures

The term “integrative procedures” subsumes the question of how societies from the Ancient Near East to the present deal with the coexistence of different religions and of how much plurality any religion can tolerate. At the same time, it will be investigated whether religious practices create unity beyond political and social differences. The Cluster of Excellence is also concerned with specific problems of integration that arose in Christianity and in Islam out of the competition or cooperation between worldly and spiritual powers. The projects range from the strategies of integration of the Israelites during the Babylonian exile and the stance of the Vatican on nationality conflicts between WWI and WWII up to the policy of the Koordinierungsrat der Muslime (Coordinating Committee of Muslims, KRM).

› Field of Research D: Violence

In the name of religions, violence has been exerted on people and objects. The members of research area D ask whether certain religions, due to their doctrine or the established practice of their faith, have an affinity to violence. They investigate the potentials for violence or peace that the religious writings and symbol systems of Judaism, Christianity and Islam contain and under what circumstances these potentials become effective for the faithful. It will also be asked how religions are reinterpreted for the purposes of legitimising violence. Projects such as “The Burning and the Censorship of Books in Late Medieval England”, “The Vatican and the Legitimisation of Physical Violence: The Example of the Spanish Civil War” and “The Lord’s Resistance Army – Violence and Christianity in East Africa” belong to research area D.



› Organisation and Advisory Board

Some 200 academics from 20 disciplines of the humanities and social sciences belong to the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”. It is headed by a board of directors which is elected for two years and consists of nine members entitled to vote, as well as by the meeting of the principal investigators (PI). Prof. Dr. Gerd Althoff, medieval historian, is the current speaker of the Cluster of Excellence.

The members of the Cluster of Excellence convene for a full meeting once every semester in order to discuss their research agenda and common activities. An advisory council, consisting of internationally renowned figures, gives scientific advice to the Cluster and makes recommendations for its further work.

The Cluster’s management is responsible for the academic coordination and practical organisation of the Cluster of Excellence. The Graduate School trains doctoral students within the research association. The first point of contact for externals who are interested is the Centre of Science Communication, which advances the dialogue with the media and with the public.

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(*head of the Centre for Research Communication*)

› Structure

› Administration and bodies

Assembly of principal investigators, PI

Advisory board

Speaker of the Cluster of Excellence

Full session of Cluster members

Board of directors of the Cluster of Excellence

Assembly of junior investigators

Board of directors of the Graduate School

› Coordination and public relations

Cluster management

Coordination of the Graduate School

Centre for Research Communication

› Research

60 research projects with heads and members of projects in 4 fields of research

45 Ph.D. Graduate School projects in 4 fields of research

6 research fellows
German and international visiting fellows

Normativity

Staging

Integrative procedures

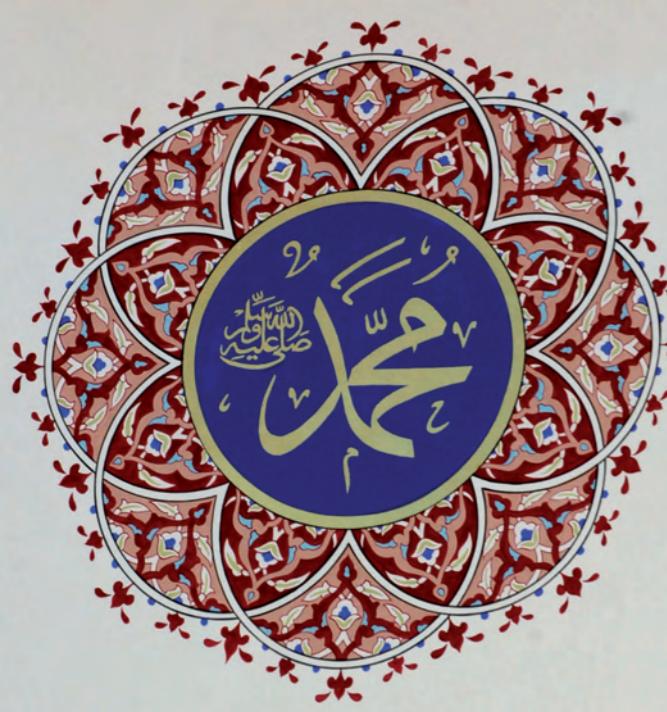
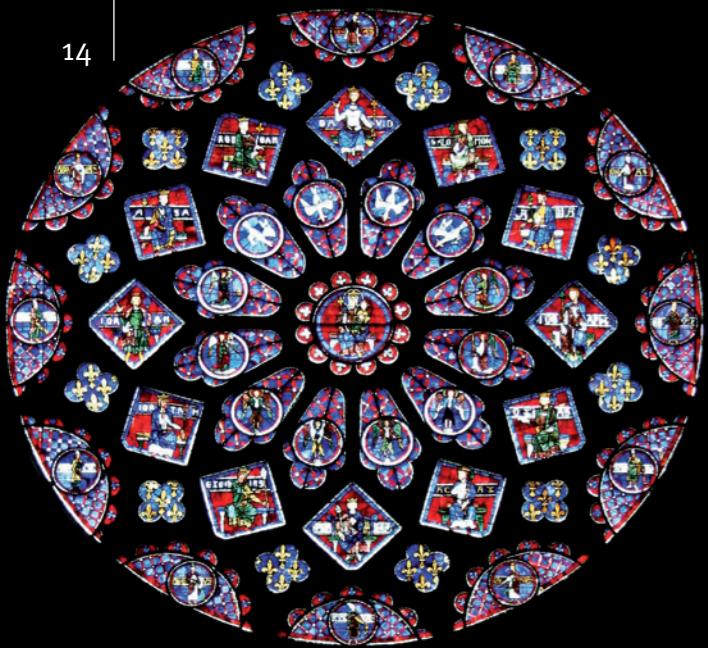
Violence

Types of events:

- › Public lecture series and discussion forums
- › Colloquia
- › Study groups
- › Seminars and Master Classes of the Graduate School

- › Symposia
- › Workshops
- › Concerts, films, exhibitions





› Graduate School

The Cluster of Excellence set up a Graduate School to support the coming academic generation. It began its work in the winter semester 2008-2009. After three admission procedures and the selection of 45 doctoral students, the Graduate School is now complete for the Cluster of Excellence's first sponsored period.

The programme is laid out to be interdisciplinary. It is oriented towards the Cluster's four main fields of research – normativity, staging, integrative procedures and violence and aims at an interdisciplinary and also flexible Ph.D. training, that yet accounts for the characteristics of the different disciplines' traditions and requirements.

While the content-related and conceptual supervision falls to the Cluster of Excellence's professors, six research fellows offer the doctoral students additional forums in group discussions, one-on-one tutoring, and interdisciplinary seminars, thus contributing to a constructive, creative and cooperative research climate. While the various available perspectives provide added stimulus to individual research projects, interdisciplinary discussion strengthens the presentation, confirmability and comprehensibility of the utilized terminology, concepts and results.

Within the scope of the Graduate School, the period of support initially amounts to two years. On the basis of the results available by then and the dissertation's schedule, a prolongation of another year until the completion of the paper is possible.





› Centre for Research Communication / Public Relations

The Cluster of Excellence explores numerous current topics relating to the conflicting interests of religion and politics. Therefore, its approx. 200 academics, in addition to their fundamental research, actively seek to establish contact with the public on pressing questions about the future – from fundamentalist violence and bioethics to religious plurality. The Centre for Research Communication advances the dialogue of scholars with representatives of the media of politics, the churches and religious communities, education, culture and society. It is the first point of contact for all those who are interested, offering the following services:

› Press Service

- › Providing contact with academics as interview partners and guest writers
- › Expert statements on events of the day
- › Multimedia-based press material on projects and events of the Cluster of Excellence
- › Up-to-date information about religion and politics through website and newsletter
- › Topic-related addressing of journalists in editorial offices of regional and national print, online, radio and television media

› Key Communicator Services

- › Providing contact with academics as speakers and experts
- › Bringing researchers into contact with representatives of politics, the churches and religious communities, education, culture and society

› Services for Members of the Cluster

- › Advice on journalistic matters
- › Media-oriented editing of research findings
- › Publication of own articles on the website
- › Identification of current topics from
“Religion and Politics”
- › Production of marketing material in the corporate
design of the Cluster of Excellence
- › PR advice on the public-oriented conception
of events
- › Imparting skills on how to interact with the media,
through seminars for junior academics and through
interview trainings
- › Advancing internal communication through an
internal newsletter and through material and
discussion platforms on the intranet



› Imprint

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