

Ansprache der Dekanin anlässlich der Eröffnung der  
Internationalen Theologischen Studientage 2016

**International Theological Conference 2016**  
**Religious Identities in the globalized World**

Meine sehr verehrten Damen und Herren,  
liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen, liebe Studierende,

Ladies and gentlemen,  
my dear and estimated colleagues, dear students,

als Dekanin der Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät ist es mir eine große Freude, Sie alle heute hier zu unseren Internationalen Theologischen Studientagen 2016 mit dem Thema "Religiöse Identität(en) in globalisierter Welt" begrüßen zu dürfen. Ganz besonders begrüße ich unsere internationalen Gäste, die sich, im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes, aus allen Erdteilen, aus Nord- und Südamerika, aus Afrika und Asien und aus Europa aufgemacht haben, um mit uns in diesen Tagen gemeinsam nachzudenken, zu diskutieren und hoffentlich neue weiterführende Einsichten zu gewinnen. Menschen, die aber vor allem bereit sind, uns ihre, je eigene wissenschaftliche wie kulturell, kontextuell und konkret situativ geprägte Perspektive zur Verfügung zu stellen. Damit reden wir nicht nur über religiöse Identität und Identitäten, über Interkulturalität und Interreligiosität, sondern sie ereignet sich direkt und konkret bei uns. Auch deshalb ist es mir eine große Freude und Ehre, Sie hier in Münster begrüßen zu dürfen. Seien Sie uns herzlich willkommen, wir sind dankbar, dass Sie da sind und freuen uns auf anregende Diskussionen und Gespräche.

Ich habe gerade die Internationalität unserer Tagung betont und so wie Sie, unsere Gäste, aus unterschiedlichen Ländern kommen, sprechen Sie unterschiedliche Sprachen. Im Zuge der Globalisierung hat sich Englisch sozusagen als lingua franca auch für den wissenschaftlichen Kontext herausgebildet. Wissend darum, dass Englisch allein nicht schon Internationalisierung ist und im Wissen darum, dass auch nicht alle unsere Gäste Englisch sprechen, erlauben Sie mir dennoch, dass ich meine

Einführung im Weiteren auf Englisch halte. Für alle nicht-englischsprachigen Gäste steht eine deutsche Fassung zur Verfügung.

I just emphasized the global nature of our conference and as you, our guests, come from different countries, we all speak different mother tongues. In the context of globalization, English has emerged as the, so to speak, *lingua franca* for the scientific context. Even knowing that English alone does not make *internationalization* – and being aware that not all of our guests speak English –, please still allow me to continue my introduction in English. For all non-English speaking guests there is a German version of my speech available.

Being the Dean of the Catholic-Theological Faculty of Münster University, it is a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome you all here today to our International Theological Conference 2016 on "Religious identity/identities in the globalized world". I particularly welcome our international guests, who, in the truest sense of the word, came from a good many parts of the world, from the Americas, Africa and Asia and from Europe, to reflect and discuss with us during these days, and hopefully to discover new insights together. People who, above all, are willing to expose to us and to share with us their specific scientific and cultural, contextual and situationally embedded perspective. Thereby, we do not only talk about religious identity and identities, about intercultural and interreligious matters, but rather about the question how these phenomena affect directly and tangibly our daily lives.

Therefore, it is my great pleasure and honour to welcome you here with us in Münster. We are very grateful that you are here and we are looking forward to many stimulating discussions and insightful conversations.

We build this theological conference on the fine tradition of theological study weeks, which took place in the years 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008, each of them focussing on different topics.

This time, for the forthcoming days, we shall focus on religious identity or religious identities in the globalized world. Thus, it encompasses all diversity and dynamics that currently confront us when it comes to religion. The worldwide globalization process is able to shift borders or even to delete them. New relationships and interdependencies are created. This also applies to religion, especially when we understand globalization not only as a phenomenon *of economics*, but as a political and cultural process, *too*. Religion can no longer be thought of as being limited – locally, regionally or even nationally. *Given* boundaries *dissipate* more and more. *Territorial* boundaries have been broken up due to various processes, such as the diverse mass migration. Limits to content and substance are affected, too. We witness how some former contours shift and dissipate, others arise; new relationships are built and new boundaries are drawn. But it would be a fallacy to believe that the limits and contours of religion or religions have ever been a hundred percent firm defined and stable at any time. However, under the conditions of increasing processes of globalization, they come under pressure ever more, especially if territorial boundaries are gone and accelerated dissemination of information as well as increasing mobility to bring closer together all the different identities.

At this stage, I can only drop some hints and make some broad suggestions about these phenomena. Fortunately, we have the opportunity to discuss them in detail in the forthcoming days. However, it is obvious to all of us that these processes have a direct impact on issues of religious identity.

Actually, we cannot speak of *a* - or *one* - religious identity (singular), because we are always dealing with different, diverse religious identities (plural). In recent decades, the term "identity" is a widely discussed concept and therefore, it is hardly clearly definable. But the term itself has moved away from old definitions, which can mean either categories of substance or those which refer to clearly determinable categories about the nature of the human being. Still, despite its conceptual blur, the term "identity" can be understood as a concept of process and therefore, it can be helpful

to describe processes of the construction of a self and processes of delimitation, change and development, in all their complexity and ambiguity.

Some of the topics we want to deal with in the forthcoming days can show us the meanings and the theological challenges which we encounter as a result of these changes. The topic of religious identity is inseparable from the contextually conditioned connections between religion and the respective culture. The question of how the cultural and the religious – as well as the non-religious – processes of pluralization shape religious identities in the "western modern world" is a key issue that seems more urgent than ever before, *due to* the related issues of mobility and migration. This holds true for both religions: Islam and Christianity. In the context of gender issues, the respective form of the relationship between religion and culture are even more crucial.

In the field of Scripture and hermeneutics, it is necessary to clarify and to discuss the significance and the status of the respective foundational documents. Is it a "sacred" scripture or "simply" a constitutive document? To which degree and in which areas is their Holy Scripture a binding authority to the believers? What is the role of the specific context of the Scripture's origin and of today's reading, and what are the consequences for the relations *to* other religions?

In the context of ecumenical relationships, the rapidly growing Pentecostal movement challenges the traditional churches, as this movement generally does not engage in ecumenical exchange and encounter because of its special structure and its understanding of Christianity. Ecumenical Theology must analyze these processes and find adequate answers.

Globalization has led to more encounters between religious traditions than ever before, both real and virtual. Here is potential for conflicts, which can easily sparked by mobilizing religious identities in political and military conflicts. These processes have to be examined, to be sure. But at the same time the de-escalating role of religious communities, which is frequently neglected, must be noticed and

strengthened.

Religious communities often define themselves through foundational narratives, but likewise they formulate concrete ethical norms and demand that their members observe them. These norms serve as a tool for social control, for the homogenization of the respective group and for distinguishing oneself from others. Often, such norms – for example in the field of sexual ethics – correspond to each other *across* confessional borders and bring about common ground or even alliances, despite the differences between the denominations or religions. In the past, not much attention has been paid to such processes of equivalence and non-equivalence.

The question of religious identity also arises around the aspect of religious teaching and learning with regard to interreligious learning and to the coexistence of various religions in given social environments. More precisely, questions such as the following have to be answered: Are claims of validity of different range and intensity in processes of learning and in daily life communicated more in a way of negotiation, or more in a delimiting way? What kind of common ground can we identify, and which antagonistic differences? How can (inter-) cultural and (inter-) religious learning processes be designed to contribute to tolerance and a fruitful coexistence?

This kaleidoscope of issues and challenges is certainly not exhaustive. But it illustrates how religious traditions are challenged to build and (re-)shape their identity under the conditions of globalization and pluralism, in facing a secular environment, and especially in dealing with other religious traditions.

Within the next days, we want to deal with these questions. We want to discuss these topics, reflect upon them, and create a fruitful exchange of our different views and opinions. And we do this by combining our own perspective with the perspective of our guests from the different cultural and religious contexts. In this sense, you are all invited to participate in the various formats of our conference: the main presentations, the eight panels focussing on different thematic priorities on Friday and Saturday morning, and the seminars in the afternoons. If you are not able to

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attend all sessions, please join the events *where* you can and like to participate.

I don't want to finish my introduction *to the* International Theological Conference without a word of thankfulness to those who made this conference possible: My special thanks goes first to Mr. Nikola Prkačin who accompanied the whole process of planning and the concrete organization and who spared neither effort nor expense to make this conference possible. I also would like to say thanks for her strong commitment to my dear colleague Marianne Heimbach-Steins, to whom I had handed over the baton for the ongoing preparation of this conference last year. I also wish to express my gratitude to the members of the preparatory group, who were responsible for the content and the design of our conference. Furthermore, I want to thank the staff of the Collegium Borromaeum, in particular seminary rector Hartmut Niehues for his generous and immediate willingness to house our guests. Last but not least, my thanks extend to all my fellow colleagues, the lecturers, teaching assistants and employees of our faculty, and to the students, especially the those of the Students' Council of this faculty, who were very involved in the preparation of these days.

Let me finish with a wish for all of us: that we share inspiring discussions and enriching insights during our conference. I would like to give the floor to my colleague Mrs Heimbach-Steins.

Prof.in Dr. Judith Könemann  
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