

## THE RELIGIOUS IN DIGITAL WORLDS

### PROGRAMME OF EVENTS SUMMER TERM 2024

Religious organizations, authorities and groups deal differently with the possibilities of digitalization, the spectrum ranging from a persistent adherence to analogue to the comprehensive use of social media, apps and artificial intelligence. The new possibilities include the digital transmission of church services and prayers, personalized online information on the correct interpretation of religious source texts, automated counselling in spiritual matters, and online confessionals. Is this therefore a case not of opposites, but rather of a symbiosis that offers innovative forms of participation and belonging, but also of political mobilization with religious overtones?

### PANEL AND LECTURE SERIES Religious practice in digital transformation From 23 April 2024

Whether digital prayers, online confessionals, or fatwas available on the internet, digitalization is bringing changes to religious practice. New spaces of interaction and new forms of participation mean that the faithful have different ways to take part in religious life. While some see a new immediacy that allows the faithful to be mobilized, others fear an erosion of established structures. The validity of everyday ritual practices is sometimes the subject of fierce debate.

At the same time, the segmented public spheres of the digital world give rise to systems of meaning similar to religions that can seem to compete with traditional religions. The lectures and the panel discussion focus on how different churches and religious communities deal with the challenges of digitalization.

### LECTURE SERIES

**23 April 2024 – Religion and gaming**  
(Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, Bremen)

**30 April 2024 – Muslim religious practice and social media in Southeast Asia**  
(Martin Slama, Wien)

**7 May 2024 – Tradition – innovation – transformation: Observations on public religious practice in post-digital times**  
(Thomas Schlag, Zürich)

### PANEL DISCUSSION

**25 June 2024 – Religious practice in digital transformation: New challenges for churches and religious communities**

### FILM SERIES

**Digital and transhuman?  
Of humans and Gods in times of digitalization  
From 9 April 2024 at the “Schloßtheater”,  
Melchersstraße 81, 48149 Münster, Germany**

Digitalization and artificial intelligence are fascinating not only for science, but also for art and popular culture, since they involve profound religious and philosophical questions: Can human beings become themselves creators – and how do they deal with their artificial creations? Will human and machine even merge with each other in the long term? Will the idea of ‘God’ become superfluous and be replaced by the human?

Cinema has always addressed such questions, with works on artificial beings, cyborgs and transhumanism going back at least to Fritz Lang’s Metropolis. More recently, the advance of digitalization and new developments in artificial intelligence have fired the imagination of filmmakers, who deal with the relationship between humans and faith in times of increasing digitalization in creative, challenging and sometimes disturbing ways.

The four-part film series organized by the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” looks at exemplary works that illuminate different aspects of the subject. A short introductory lecture contextualizes each film, while there will be an opportunity after each film for lively discussion in the foyer.

**9 April 2024 – Blade Runner**  
(1982; Director: Ridley Scott)

**14 May 2024 – Her**  
(2013; Director: Spike Jonze)

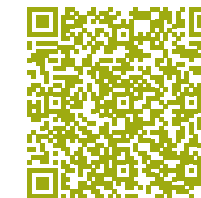
**11 June 2024 – Ex Machina**  
(2015; Director: Alex Garland)

**9 July 2024 – Le tout nouveau testament**  
(2015; Director: Jaco Van Dormael)

### RESEARCH PROJECT

**Conspiracy theorists, esotericists and patchwork religions:  
Research on new ideological movements on the net**

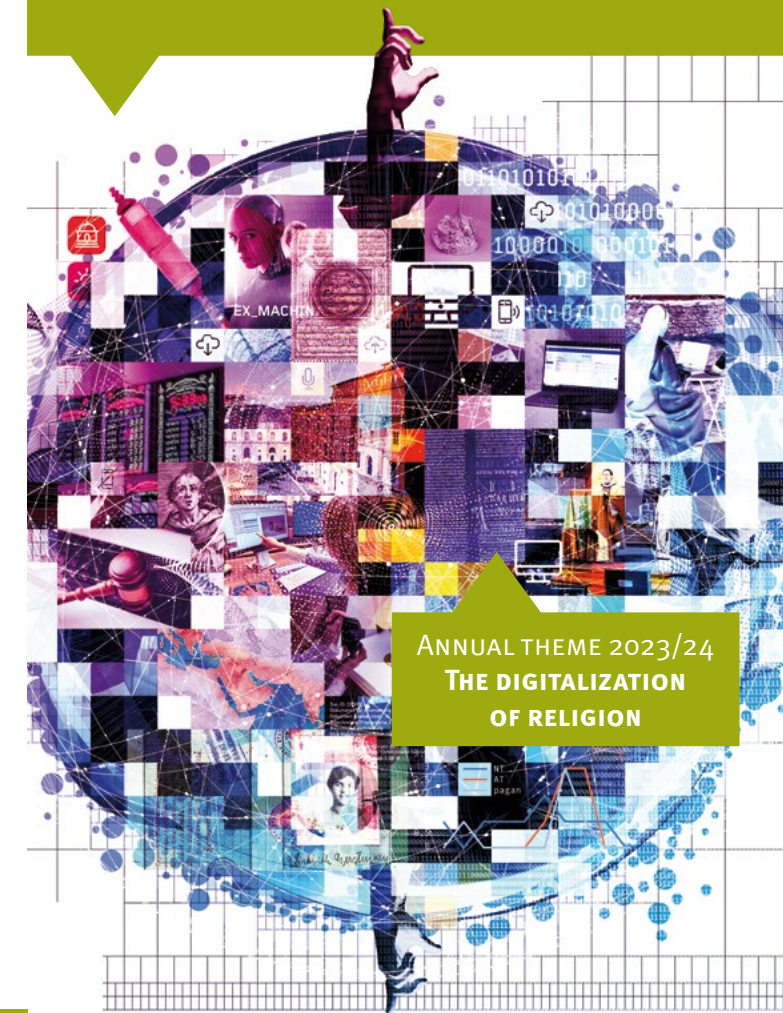
In crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, studying groups that spread conspiracy theories on the internet is highly relevant. These groups range from the harmlessly esoteric to the dangerously anti-democratic. They often use religion to underpin their arguments, and the internet enables them to mobilize people and to achieve resonance in the social mainstream. A Cluster of Excellence research project led by Thorsten Quandt is investigating such online ideological movements with religious overtones. The annual theme will see interdisciplinary discussion of the project.



Current information on the programme  
of the annual theme 2023/24

## THE DIGITALIZATION OF RELIGION

Participation and belonging in a networked world





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## THE DIGITALIZATION OF RELIGION

Digitalization is transforming all areas of society, including religion and research on religion. But there has been little research so far on the relationship between digitalization and religion, which may be due to the fact that progress in digital technology has been assigned to ‘rationality’ and thought of as being the opposite of ‘religion’.

The annual theme for 2023/24, “The digitalization of religion: Participation and belonging in a networked world”, addresses this issue from two perspectives. Discussion focuses in the winter term of 2023/24 on the usefulness of digital tools for religion and research on religion – more specifically, on how far the digital can be seen as a new arena of religious practice, and how far it expands the study of religion.

The focus in the summer term of 2024 is on the religious in digital worlds, i.e. how far religion and spirituality can be thought of anew in the digital world. This ranges from traditional religious communities that are trying out new forms of religion on the web and social media, to new ideological movements that are spreading conspiracy theories on the internet and decorating them with religious elements.

The annual theme presents current research work from the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”, gives a voice to researchers from different disciplines and from outside the university, and brings them into conversation with representatives of different religious groups and with the general public. A film series “Digital and transhuman?” focuses on how pop culture addresses the interpenetration of religion and digitality.

## DIGITAL HUMANITIES

The use of Digital Humanities (DH) opens up new perspectives on old source material in the study of religion in the humanities. The indexing, editing and digital analysis of religious texts can be linked to geographical, personal and cultural references and data. This gives rise to a worldwide knowledge network that constantly grows due to the inclusion of digitized cultural artefacts.

### PRELUDE TO ANNUAL THEME

**LECTURE**  
**Sidetrack or fast lane? Theological research in the tracks of the Digital Humanities**  
(Frederike van Oorschot and Christopher Nunn)  
**24 October 2023, 4.00 p.m.**

What fields of digital research are there in theology? How do practices of digital research affect epistemology and the philosophy of science? The opening lecture of the annual theme addresses these and other questions.

**WORKSHOP**  
**Citation techniques under the magnifying glass: A digital view of intertextuality in late antique letters**  
(with Christopher Nunn)  
**25 October 2023**

The workshop uses late antique sources – namely, letters written by the Church Father Augustine of Hippo – to introduce scholars at the Cluster of Excellence to research into digital intertextuality.

### LECTURE SERIES

**Public workshop reports from the Digital Humanities**  
**From 7 November 2023**

Several research projects of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” apply methods from the Digital Humanities (DH), these projects ranging from antiquity to the present. In the workshop reports, the DH teams present their specific digital approaches, and discuss findings and opportunities that arise from them.

**7 November 2023 – Digital philology and the text of the New Testament** (Holger Strutwolf)

**21 November 2023 – Digital religion? Theory and practice in the cataloguing of the Christian cultural heritage**  
(Norbert Köster, Carolin Hemsing)

**5 December 2023 – ‘I turn to Your Holiness in bitter distress’: An insight into the digital factory of “Asking the Pope for Help”**  
(Hubert Wolf)

**16 January 2024 – Apocalypse goes digital: Digital edition and intertextual analysis of the fourth book of Ezra**  
(Lutz Doering, Florian Neitmann)

**23 January 2024 – SpeechAreas: Religious texts as a resource in the colonial context**  
(Ines Weinrich, Felicity Jenz)

**Webquest on the workshop reports:**  
Those interested in the themes and in working digitally are invited to do their own research on the internet. Digital tools help to solve tasks, and are an interactive way for scholars to expand their knowledge in the thematic field covered by the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”. Scholars can thereby discover for themselves the potentials and limits of the Digital Humanities.

**FOR THE PROGRAMME IN THE SUMMER TERM OF 2024, PLEASE TURN OVER.** →

## CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE “RELIGION AND POLITICS”

The Cluster of Excellence has been investigating the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures since 2007. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in the funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the “dynamics of tradition and innovation”. They analyze in transepochal studies ranging from antiquity to the present day the conditions and factors that make religion an engine of political and social change, with their focus being above all on the paradox that religions often develop their innovative potential precisely by drawing on their traditions. The research network is the largest of its kind in Germany; and, of the Clusters of Excellence, one of the oldest and the only one to deal with the issue of religion. It will receive funding of 31 million euros from 2019 to 2025.

### ORGANISATION

**Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”**  
in cooperation with the Center for Digital Humanities (CDH) of the University of Münster  
Prof. Dr. Angelika Lohwasser, Dr. Marcel Bubert, Dr. Jan Horstmann, Prof. Dr. Jan Keupp, Prof. Dr. Thorsten Quandt, Prof. Dr. Dorothea Schulz

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