

Press release

“The digitalization of religion – barely studied before”

New annual theme at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” on religion in digital worlds – Virtual prayers, online confessionals, fatwas on the web: research on new forms of religious belonging – Digital Humanities expand religious research – Programme from 24 October with workshop reports, webquests, panels, and lecture and film series

Münster, 12 October 2023 (exc) The focus of the [annual theme for 2023/24](#) at the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” is the digitalization of religion. “The field is still little explored, although digitalization is changing society fundamentally, including religion and research on religion”, says Egyptologist and annual theme coordinator Prof. Dr. Angelika Lohwasser. From 24 October, a variety of formats will highlight how digital tools can provide religious research with innovative approaches, and will focus on religion in digital worlds. “Whether digital prayers, online confessionals, or fatwas on the internet, traditional religious communities are trying out forms in the web and social media, apps and AI. At the same time, new ideological movements are spreading conspiracy theories with religious set pieces on the web. But there have barely been any studies so far on such forms of affiliation and mobilization”.

The annual theme will present current research from the Cluster of Excellence in workshop reports, webquests, lecture series, and film and discussion evenings, bringing researchers from many disciplines into conversation with each other and with religious groups and the general public. Developed with the Center for Digital Humanities (CDH) at the University of Münster and entitled “The digitalization of religion: Participation and belonging in a networked world”, the [annual programme](#) was designed by Angelika Lohwasser, who coordinates the Digital Humanities projects at the Cluster of Excellence, together with historians Prof. Dr. Jan Keupp and Dr. Marcel Bubert, communication scientist Prof. Dr. Thorsten Quandt, anthropologist Prof. Dr. Dorothea Schulz, and SCDH director Dr. Jan Horstmann.

The event begins on 24 October with a public lecture by the Protestant theologians PD Dr. Frederike van Oorschot and Dr. Christopher Nunn on “Sidetrack or fast lane? Theological research in the tracks of the Digital Humanities”. (In lecture theatre JO 1, Johannisstraße 1, 48143 Münster; starts at 4.00 pm. Registration for Zoom participation at veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de.) This will be followed from 7 November with the series “Workshop reports from the Digital Humanities” (with [webquest](#)), when members of the Cluster of Excellence will present projects, including church historians Prof. Dr. Hubert Wolf and Prof. Dr. Holger Strutwolf, Jewish scholar Prof. Dr. Lutz Doering, and historians Prof. Dr. Ines Weinrich and PD Dr. Felicity Jenz.

Thus, the annual theme will focus in the winter term of 2023/24 on the use of digital tools for religion and research on religion. “DH tools open up new insights into historical sources,

religious writings and cultural materials, enabling them to be indexed, edited and analyzed”, explains Angelika Lohwasser. “Linked to geographical, personal and cultural data, DH can help create a worldwide network of knowledge.”

The annual theme in the summer term of 2024 will focus on diverse religious practices in digital worlds. As communication scientist Prof. Dr. Thorsten Quandt explains, religious organizations, authorities and groups treat the opportunities offered by digitalization in different ways, with some stubbornly persisting with the analogue and others embracing social media, apps and artificial intelligence. The lectures and discussions will range from “Religion and gaming” to Islamic social media practices in Southeast Asia. A film series entitled “Digital and transhuman?” will show how pop culture addresses the interpenetration of religion and digitality. (vvm/tec/fbu)

Programme of the annual theme: https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/aktuelles/themenjahr/digitalisierung_der_religion/index.html

Folder with programme: https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/religion_und_politik/aktuelles/flyer_themenjahr_gesamt_en.pdf

Caption: Programme of the annual theme “The digitalization of religion” (Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”); Egyptologist Prof. Dr. Angelika Lohwasser (private); Communication scientist Prof. Dr. Thorsten Quandt (private)

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The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation” has been investigating since 2007 the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures. 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. The focus of interest is on Europe and the Mediterranean region, as well as on their entanglements with the Near East, Africa, North and Latin America. 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.

