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Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation"

Funding Line: Cluster of Excellence

Spokesperson: Prof. Dr. Detlef Pollack, Sociology of Religion; Faculty of Education and Social Sciences

Participating disciplines at the University of Münster: history, law and political science; sociology of religion and religious studies; Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Islamic theology; psychology; classical and modern philology; and philosophy, art history, Arabic studies, ethnology, ancient Assyriology, archaeology, Egyptology, Jewish studies, Byzantine studies, musicology.

Status: approved in 2007 and 2012 as part of the Excellence Initiative; approved in 2018 as part of the Excellence Strategy

Brief description of the project:

Since its establishment more than ten years ago, the Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics" has dealt with the historically changing relationship between religion and politics in Europe, the Mediterranean region, the United States and Latin America, as well as in India and regions of Africa. The spectrum ranges in terms of content from antiquity to the present, from Judaism, Christianity and Islam to modern forms of esotericism.

Taking up these research areas and continuing interdisciplinary collaboration, the Cluster will focus its work in the new funding phase on the question of how religion can stimulate, contain and modify societal and political debates, where the dynamic potency of religion lies, and which external conditions encourage or limit its ability to mobilize people. This will focus attention on the active role of religion in the political and social conflicts of the past and present.

In order to grasp the political and social dynamics of religion in the interplay of tradition and innovation, the Cluster will focus on working

out different structural, semantic and practical tensions: tensions between (1) transcultural entanglement and disentanglement, (2) religious diversity and legal-political unity, and (3) criticism of religion and religious apology.

Our long-term goal is to make Münster the leading centre for interdisciplinary research on religion in Germany and Europe. The Cluster can already build on a series of sustainable structural changes at the WWU, on the creation of new professorships in, for example, Jewish and Islamic studies, and in the political and social sciences, as well as on the establishment of the Centre for Islamic Theology (ZIT), the Institute for Jewish Studies, and the Centre for Religion and Modernity (CRM). In addition, a “Campus of Religions” will come into being, which, by spatially integrating old and new institutional structures, will strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation, in particular between denominational and non-denominational research on religion, and will promote interreligious understanding.

The promotion of young researchers in the integrated graduate school remains a central concern of the Cluster. In addition, the Cluster is planning a new interdisciplinary MA programme in “Religion and Politics”.

To illustrate the new work projects, we refer to one example here. First, the Cluster intends to analyze in a large-scale project how religion influences the tension currently emerging in Europe between the cosmopolitan orientation of those gaining from globalization on the one hand, and the national positioning of populations that are more likely to belong to those losing out as a result of globalization. Why can religion act as an identity marker in this conflict? What ideas of social belonging exist? What are the effects of feelings of threat on the formation of social identities? Second, the Cluster will also examine the role of religion in the cultural and political self-assertion of ethnic minorities. Why are demands for participation formulated in the medium of religion? To what extent does religion function as a bridge to participation in society? By examining the ambivalent role of religion in the integration problems of European societies, the Cluster will confront the urgent challenges of a globalized world and seek to contribute to the sensitive handling of these challenges.