#### **ORGANIZATION**

#### Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics"

Dr. Marcel Bubert Prof. Dr. Thorsten Quandt Prof. Dr. Dorothea Schulz Johannisstraße 1, 48143 Münster Tel: +49 251 83-23376 religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de

#### VENUE AND REGISTRATION

Cluster of Excellence lecture theatre Room JO 1 Johannisstr. 4 48143 Münster

To participate via Zoom, register at: veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de

## ANNUAL THEME 2023/2024 "THE DIGITALIZATION OF RELIGION"

Digitalization is changing society, including religion and the study of religion. This is the focus of the Cluster of Excellence's annual theme for 2023/24. Whether digital prayers, online confessionals, or fatwas on the internet – traditional religious communities are trying out new forms of religion on the web and social media, in apps and AI. And non-religious movements are using the internet to spread conspiracy theories that have religious elements. Very little research has so far been done on these forms of religion.

In the study of religion, digital methods are opening up new insights into historical sources, religious writings and material culture. The Digital Humanities (DH) explore, edit and analyze these. The annual theme presents interdisciplinary research from the Cluster of Excellence in workshop reports and webquests, lectures, and film and discussion evenings, as well as bringing researchers into dialogue with religious groups and the general public.

#### **CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE "RELIGION AND POLITICS"**

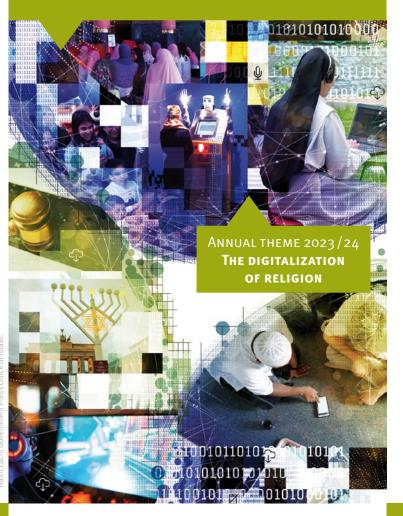
The Cluster of Excellence has been investigating the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures since 2007. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in the funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the "dynamics of tradition and innovation". 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.



Panel and lecture series at the Cluster of Excellence

# RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN THE ERA OF DIGITALIZATION

30 April - 25 June 2024 | 6 - 8 pm



#### RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN THE ERA OF DIGITALIZATION

Religious organizations, authorities and groups deal differently with the opportunities offered by digitalization: while some persist with analogue, others make extensive use of social media, apps and artificial intelligence. Church services and prayers transmitted digitally, personalized online information on how to interpret religious texts correctly, automated advice on spiritual matters, online confessionals and religious chat groups – these are just some of the new possibilities. So is it perhaps a matter not so much of opposites as of a symbiosis that enables innovative forms both of participation and belonging, and of religiously charged political mobilization?

While some primarily emphasize the opportunities that arise for churches and religious communities to open up new spaces for interaction and participation, others are more aware of the challenges or even dangers posed by the potential erosion of established structures or by the competition that new, quasi-religious systems of meaning in the digital world represent. The latter also include the promises of salvation associated with digital utopias and the promises made by prophets of technology. In dialogue with experts, the lectures and panel discussion will explore these questions from various perspectives and in different contexts.





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#### LECTURE

Tuesday, 30 April 2024, 6-8 pm

Muslim religious practice and social media in Southeast Asia

Martin Slama

(social anthropologist, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna)

Introduction: Dorothea Schulz

(social and cultural anthropologist, University of Münster)

The use of social media by Muslims and how Islam is represented on the Internet is an area that has already been heavily researched, with the numerous studies having also helped us understand current trends, dynamics and changes in Indonesian society. But what can we learn from this in relation to more recent changes in Indonesia's religious landscape? To claim that there is a direct causal link between the introduction of social media and religious change would be too short-sighted. The lecture will therefore deal with the question of what religious change in Indonesia actually means, and what role(s) social media play in these processes. The lecture will examine as a possible answer to these questions the change in power structures and notions of authority. Also important is to make a clear analytical distinction between the terms "change" and "transformation".

#### LECTURE

Tuesday, 7 May 2024, 6-8 pm

Tradition – Innovation – Transformation. Beobachtungen zur öffentlichen Religionspraxis in postdigitalen Zeiten

(Tradition – Innovation – Transformation: Observations on public religious practice in the post-digital era; lecture in german)

Thomas Schlag

(Protestant theologian, University of Zurich)

**Introduction:** Thorsten Quandt

(communication scientist, University of Münster)

The practice of religious communities has undoubtedly been transformed in recent years by developments in the digital world. Long before the pandemic, digital technologies had greatly increased the communicative demands placed on religious actors, albeit in a rather casual and little-noticed way. It is for this reason that we can observe widespread processes of negotiation that clearly aim to achieve a balance between religious tradition and innovation. This is all the more true in view of the now quasi-religious promises being made by prophets of technology. The lecture uses the Zurich research focus on "Digital Religion(s)" to shed light on how far we can rightly speak of "transformation" here. It will also illustrate how these transformation phenomena are reflected in various religious fields of action, such as new community networking, education and the public presence of religious "agencies", as well as the new challenges that this poses for religious communities.

#### PANEL DISCUSSION

Tuesday, 25 June 2024, 6-8 pm

Religiöse Praxis im digitalen Wandel. Neue Herausforderungen für Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften (Religious practice in the era of digitalization: New challenges for churches and religious communities; panel discussion in german)

**Introduction:** Marcel Bubert (historian, University of Münster)

Participants: Matthias Kopp (press spokesperson of the German Bishops' Conference, Bonn), Natalie Kraneiß (Islamic scholar, University of Münster), Gerald Kretzschmar (Protestant theologian, University of Tübingen), Anna Puzio (philosopher of technology and Catholic theologian, University of Twente)

**Moderated by:** Joachim Frank (journalist, Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger)

Whether digital prayers, online confessionals or fatwas available on the internet – changes in religious practice go hand in hand with digitalization. The emergence of new spaces for interaction and new forms of participation have changed how believers can be involved in their religious community. While some see this as a new immediacy that allows for believers to be mobilized, others fear that established structures will be eroded, with fierce discussion sometimes taking place concerning the validity of conventional practices. At the same time, the segmented public spheres of the digital world are seeing the emergence of quasi-religious systems of meaning that may appear to compete with traditional religions. The panel discussion will deal with how different churches and religious communities cope with the challenges of digitalization.