

Press release

“The Ukraine war has exacerbated religious conflicts”

Scholar of Eastern Europe Thomas Bremer on the future of Orthodoxy and religious diversity in Ukraine – “Orthodox churches are falling short as peacemakers – no agreement in sight” – Lecture in Münster on Tuesday as part of Cluster of Excellence annual theme “Religious Dynamics”

Münster, 12 January 2023 (exc) According to researchers, the Ukraine war has greatly exacerbated religious conflicts in Ukraine. “Surveys show that many Orthodox believers do not want to identify with either of the churches in the country that were already in conflict, but call themselves ‘simply Orthodox’”, says Prof. Dr. Thomas Bremer, who is a Catholic theologian, Eastern Churches specialist, and peace researcher. “It is true that the Church, which once belonged to the Russian Church, has declared its independence. But many people suspect it of being pro-Russian, and it must reposition itself in society. Both churches are falling short as peacemakers”. The consequences of the war have gone far beyond Ukraine. “Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Church, is using anti-Western rhetoric to justify the war, which also severely affects relations with other churches in the world”.

As part of the annual theme “Religious Dynamics” of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster, Thomas Bremer will speak next Tuesday about “Religious Dynamics in Ukraine”. He will not only present the complex religious situation in the country, but also show how the war has intensified the polarization of Orthodoxy. “We cannot expect the two competing Orthodox churches to come to an agreement soon”. The historian of Eastern European Prof. Dr. Ricarda Vulpius from the Cluster of Excellence will introduce the lecture. Interested parties are invited to attend the lecture and discussion. The event on 17 January will take place from 6.15-7.45 in the lecture hall building of the Cluster of Excellence, room JO 1, Johannisstraße 4 in Münster. Those interested in participating via Zoom can register at veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de.

“Orthodoxy, as the largest religious community in Ukraine, was and is divided”, explains Bremer. One part belongs to the Russian Church, another wants no connection to Moscow. “The attempt made in 2018 by the Patriarch of Constantinople, the head of Orthodoxy, to resolve the dilemma plunged the Orthodox Church worldwide into a conflict that remains unresolved to this day”. Attention should also be paid to Russian Orthodoxy, since it still claims jurisdiction over the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

In the lecture, Thomas Bremer will analyze the position of the Russian Orthodox Church during the war and the dispute within the Ukrainian church, as well as outline some probable religious and political consequences of the war. “Even before the Russian attack on Ukraine, the country was marked by great religious diversity”. Besides the majority Orthodox believers, the religious landscape comprises Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Jews. “The war has become another dynamic factor in the religious landscape”. (vvm/fbu)

Lecture evening “Religious Dynamics in Ukraine”

Tuesday, 17 January 2023 | 6.15 - 7.45

Introduction: Prof. Dr. Ricarda Vulpius, historian

Lecture: Prof. Dr. Thomas Bremer, Catholic theologian

Lecture hall building of the Cluster of Excellence | Room JO 1, Johannisstraße 4, 48143 Münster

Organization: Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” and Ecumenical Institute of the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Münster

Caption: Catholic theologian and expert on Eastern Churches, Prof. Dr. Thomas Bremer (Photo: Niina Into, Helsinki)

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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.