

Researching Religions & Politics – Young German Perspectives

Panel Chair: Ulf Plessentin

Political conditions often had and still have a profound influence on religious groups. Likewise, religious groups endeavour to impact politics, policy-making, and politicians, both in past and present times. Topics in the nexus of religion and politics are therefore integral part of any scientific study of religions. Novel and interesting research has been conducted by sociologists, political scientists and scholars of religious studies over the last decade. Due to their cross-cultural and historical perspectives, religious studies can contribute fruitfully to ongoing academic discussions. In order to provide a platform that unites different approaches, a working group on religions and politics was founded within the DVRW, the German section of IAHR. In this panel, young scholars present their research, especially on processes of adaptation to and transformation of political structures. Additionally, the mechanisms by which political conditions foster innovative or traditional religious structures and practices shall be discussed.

Thomas Jurczyk

Religious and Political Semantics in the first two Books of the Maccabees

The major aim of this paper¹ is identify possible indications of a distinction between the two (modern) societal spheres of “Politics” and “Religion” in pre-modern societies. This shall be achieved by analyzing the semantics of the first two books of the Maccabees. For instance, the examination of the use of semantic fields related to the terms hagios/hieros, basileuō, ho nomos, and to kratos might point to a differentiation between the above-mentioned societal spheres. By analyzing a concrete historical example, this study hopes to contribute to the much debated question of potential societal differentiation in pre-modern societies.

Katharina Neef

Churches, Chapels, Clubs. Legal Dimensions of and their Implications on Religions in 20th century-Germany

The paper discusses the possibilities of small religious groups to become (at least legally) accepted religions in the German federal states of the 20th century. Often, the precise legal formation affects not only the hierarchical and bureaucratic organization in question, it also influences the conception of the group itself. Communities and their members begin to understand themselves and their organisation as religious or non-religious, they locate themselves in specific relations to other participants of the (religious, political, scientific or societal) field, and they act and communicate in specific ways.

Ulf Plessentin

Syriac-Orthodox Christians in Sweden and Germany: Adaptation to and Application of Democratic Principles

Since the mid-1960s, Syriac-Orthodox Christians have migrated to Europe, especially to Germany and Sweden. In the first decades after their settlement, new church communities were founded, often with the assistance of the established Churches. Over the course of the last years, a new generation of Syriac-Orthodox Christians grew more powerful and increasingly visible by advocating their own interest with politicians and in the public of both countries. This shift would not have been possible without adaptations to the conditions and roles which actors can play in democratic and open societies. This paper will render a twofold perspective: on the one hand, it will show how Western societies have changed European Syriac Orthodox communities. On the other hand, it will examine how Syriac Christians successfully exert influence on politics in their own interest both for their European communities as well as for those in the historical regions of origin.