



International Symposium

***Study Day***

***Education on the Net –  
Ethics and the image of Man,  
AI and the Metaverse***

**Thursday, 5 October 2023  
from 9.00 to 17.30**

**Hotel Odelya  
Missionsstrasse 21 in Basel**

The **plusbildung** association has been the Swiss umbrella organization for non-formal education of educational institutions, specialized agencies and organizations from the Catholic, Protestant-Reformed and ecumenical environments, starting in 2013. Since then, life contexts, living and communication spaces, as well as work requirements in the Swiss educational landscape have constantly changed:

- from a predominantly Christian to a multi-religious society. This means that ecumenical education has to position and develop in an ideological field which is increasingly heterogeneous;
- toward a digital society. Therefore the field of theology as it is taught and lived, just like the prerequisites and possibilities of education, are expanding and changing in a decisive way.

Since this raises new questions about the interplay of space and education, questions of (theological) authority, of interpretive power, etc., plusbildung commissioned a project from the **Faculty of Theology at the University of Zurich** in the form of accompanying research. At the same time, a research project was launched at the University of Zurich, which is also dedicated to research questions in the field of „Education - Digitalization - Interreligious Challenges/ Interreligious Learning“. At this symposium, research results are to be presented and discussed for the first time.

The symposium takes place in an international environment. The plusbildung association has invited the two European educational networks **Oikosnet Europe** ([www.oikosnet.eu/](http://www.oikosnet.eu/)) and the **European Evangelical and Anglican Network for Lifelong Learning EAEE** (<https://www.eaee.eu/>) to a joint conference in Basel from October 4 to 8, 2023. Oikosnet Europe is a network of Christian academies, lay centers and other educational organizations - including the plusbildung association - from the churches of the Reformation as well as from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. EAEE has its focus on Christian adult education.

This international character and the fact that proven education professionals who are also experts on digital innovations and challenges including current developments in the field of „artificial intelligence“ are gathered at this conference, allows us to perceive (church) education and digitalization from different perspectives, while discussing the opportunities and risks of current developments, especially from a theological and ethical point of view.

We gratefully acknowledge the interest of the **Evangelical Reformed Church of Switzerland EKS-EERS** and the **Roman Catholic Central Conference of Switzerland RKZ**, who co-host this symposium together with our association.

Rev. Walter Lüssi

President of the association «plusbildung - ecumenical education landscape switzerland»

**FROM ALPS TO ALGORITHMS: PLUSBILDUNG  
IN DIGITAL SOCIETY**

Dr. Jasmine Suhner

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**«THE METAVERSE MAY BE VIRTUAL - BUT THE  
IMPACT WILL BE REAL» (QUOTE FROM META)**

Rev. Dr. Phil. Gernot Meier

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**Critical Reflections on the Digital Society**

Prof. Alf Linderman, Veronika Matějková,  
Rev. Dr. Gernot Meier, Dr. Jasmine Suhner  
Moderator: Rev. Walter Lüssi

**PANEL 1**

Current dynamics of digitalization influence, shape and transform both (inter-)religious communication as well as corresponding teaching and learning processes. The shift to digital education is also driven by the need to remain competitive in a rapidly changing educational landscape and to improve teaching/learning processes (and economic performance) using technology. Digital transformation means more than implementing technology: it requires a strategic and holistic approach as well as an innovation- and participation-friendly educational culture.

What exactly does this mean for religious, interreligious and spiritual learning? For educational institutions and staff? Which aspects come into focus in the digitalized world of religious education?

The research project „thinking hybrid - thinking ahead. plusbildung in digitaler Gesellschaft“ is dedicated to these questions. It is a cooperation of the research project „Interreligious Learning in Digital Society“ (cf. UFSP „Digital Religion(s)“: [www.digitalreligions.uzh.ch](http://www.digitalreligions.uzh.ch)) and the Swiss organisation „plusbildung“. For the first time, we publicly present findings from this participatory research project.

**PANEL 2**

Monday morning at the largest roller-coaster park in Europe. For the first time 14 people put on a data helmet, special shoes and hold two small devices. They enter a completely empty, slightly darkened room. They stand in a circle. The lights go off. Suddenly they are in a light of 3D environment and taken directly into a story. No, they are part of a story. The joysticks turn out to be tools for painting, repairing and keeping evil enemies away when necessary. The wind of the future blows....

What does this scenario have to do with (church) education? What potential lies in the opening of a new (surrounding) world in which religion will also manifest itself? The organization, institution and performance of the entire church will change. Slowly, but effectively. Now is the time to set the course and to recognize the beauties of the digital and the analog worlds. The professional handling of these worlds and their respective contents is a task in the field of theology and pedagogy.

... after 17 minutes, the people come back from to the digital world. A portal has been shown on their data helmets. „How long were you on the story?“ „Over 2 hours, for sure“. Perception changes ... massively.

**PANEL 3**

The technology that accompanies us everywhere and all the time has a great impact on our daily lives; how we live, how we celebrate, how we relate to others, and how we work. And in principle, technological development is to be welcomed – and we all must learn more about the impact and potential of this development. But precisely because new technologies, like the development of AI, have such a great impact on the way we live our lives, we also need to critically reflect on their implications. Are we facing technologies that have the potential to become conscious and thus consequently also have their own, potentially harmful, intentions? What does human integrity mean in the new context, and should we also be concerned with the integrity of technology? And furthermore, how can we develop cultural practices for the way we are assessing information, interactions and even people to avoid being overtly manipulated by new technologies and AI?

After a round of introductory remarks by the panel members, we will have ample opportunity for dialogue on these and other related questions.

#### Workshop 1

##### **Metaverse**

Based on the discussion in the morning, we enter a small digital world of the Evangelische Landeskirche in Baden, Germany. We log in, find ourselves on our island and explore it. Then we go deeper into the other reality and its possibilities. At the end we celebrate a short worship and also look at the ritual possibilities in the metaverse.

For the workshop you need a laptop and (mandatory!) a headphone.

Rev. Dr. phil. Gernot Meier / Ulli Naefken

#### Workshop 2

##### **Improving Range and Possibilities**

How to use the new possibilities for our network: The digital and virtual tools allow us to work without travelling in our network. We will work on the tools we want to use, the topics we have to tackle, the groups we have to install and the impact we want to get. The aim should be to stay closer together and to increase our collaboration. In this group we want to discuss how to reach this goal and which persons and groups should be included who are not necessarily members of the network now.

Heinz-Joachim Lohmann

#### Workshop 3

##### **Doing theology through podcast**

Podcasts are a new and very popular medium of information today. There are more and more attempts to do theological education through this medium. What makes a podcast successful? What can we learn from popular attempts in this field?

Dr. Andreas Loos / Dr. Thorsten Dietz

#### Workshop 4

##### **Need for innovation - need for cooperation partners**

Open workshop: You have an idea, a project and are looking for partners? Then bring a short presentation (size flipchart paper size). If someone else is interested, they can add their name. You then moderate the workshop on your project.

## PERSONS INVOLVED

**Dr. Thorsten Dietz** works for Fokus Theologie, an institute for theological adult education of the Reformed Churches in German-speaking Switzerland. For 12 years he was professor of systematic theology at the TABOR Protestant University in Marburg, Germany. In addition to academic publications, he has recently published popular books and theological podcasts, at the internet platform Worthaus as well as the podcast „Das Wort und das Fleisch“, the podcast for ethical questions „Karte und Gebiet“ and most recently “Geist.Zeit” with Andreas Loos.

**Prof. Alf Linderman:** Associate Professor of sociology of religion at Uppsala University. He has just ended his position as the Executive Director of the Sigtuna Foundation. As a researcher, Linderman is specialized on research at the nexus of media, religion, and culture. During his long stint at the Sigtuna Foundation, Linderman has been deeply involved in various interdisciplinary dialogues ranging from climate and sustainability issues to the exploration of human consciousness and free will.

**Heinz-Joachim Lohmann:** Vice Director of the Protestant Academy of Berlin, Director of Studies for Democratic Culture and Church in Rural Regions, Representative of the Protestant Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia against xenophobic conviction, group related discrimination and incitement to hatred, designated Executive Secretary of Oikosnet Europe.

**Dr. Andreas Loos** joined Fokus Theologie, an institute for theological adult education of the Reformed Churches in German-speaking Switzerland a year ago. He is also core-team member of RefLab, the “digital campfire” of the Reformed Church in Zurich. From 2002 until 2022 he acted as lecturer in Systematic Theology at St. Chrischona Theological Seminary, Basel. Together with Thorsten Dietz he is eager to explore the digital promises for theology and adult education. Together they recently started the theological podcast “Geist.Zeit”.

**Rev. Walter Lüssi** is president of plusbildung - ecumenical network for adult education - in Switzerland and also president of Oikosnet Europe. He was a parish pastor, pastor for people with an intellectual disability, director of the Protestant Conference and Study Centre Bolderen near Zurich and General Secretary of the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich.

**Veronika Matějková:** She serves as President of the European Protestant and Anglican Network for life-long Learning (EAEE) from 2022. As a doctoral student of practical theology at Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University, she focussed on catechesis for adults. She also did research on self-concepts in relation to learning and the construction of identity (identities) against a theological background.

**Rev. Dr. phil. Gernot Meier:** Religious educator, acting director of the Evangelische Akademie Baden, Germany. Lecturer at the University of Offenburg of Applied Sciences, Electrical Engineering, Medical Technology and Computer Science on the subject of artificial intelligence; Lecturer at the University of Heidelberg, Centre for European History and Cultural Studies & Social Science.

**Ulli Naefken:** Digital Producer of the Protestant Church in Baden, Germany. Producer of the Film Academy BW, Germany; special interest in the area of the metaverse: „I am interested in (future) interaction possibilities of individual avatars. Will we be able to shake hands virtually and also ‚feel‘ this?“

**Dr. Jasmine Suhner:** Co-Leader of the interdisciplinary research project “Interreligious Challenges and Interreligious Learning in a Digital Society“ within the University Research Focus „Digital Religion(s)“ at the University of Zurich, Switzerland ([www.digitalreligions.uzh.ch](http://www.digitalreligions.uzh.ch)) and Lecturer for (Inter-)Religious Education at the University of Lucerne, Switzerland. Her multidisciplinary research interests include: interreligious learning, digital society, embodiment and religious education, as well as philosophy of religion.

The study day will be simultaneously translated into German and French.

Interpreting team: **Paula Jane Martin, Sylvi Nicola, Regula Pickel, Natalie Studhalter**

Plusbildung



Ecumenical network for adult education in Switzerland

Oikosnet



Network of Christian academies and laity centres in Europe

EAEE



European Evangelical and Anglican Network for Lifelong Learning

Universität Zürich



URPP Digital Religion(s)

EKS



Evangelical Reformed Church of Switzerland

rkz



Roman Catholic Central Conference of Switzerland