

Press release

No Religion as a “New Religion”?

Renowned sociologist Linda Woodhead assumes Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professorship at the Cluster of Excellence – Research on the growing number of non-religious people in Europe and the USA – Public lecture on 8 May, “Is ‘No Religion’ the New Religion?”

Münster, 28 April 2017 (exc) The current Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of the University of Münster, Prof. Dr. Linda Woodhead researches the growing number of non-religious people worldwide, the “nones”. During her visiting professorship in the summer semester, the British sociologist of religion will analyse the group of those people who are not members of an organised religion – but are not all secular or atheists either. She will research the reasons why an ever growing number of people, particularly younger ones, are unaffiliated with any organised religion and why the Christian majority is diminishing in some countries. The scholar from Lancaster University will discuss the extent to which no religion is the “new religion” in a public lecture on Monday, 8 May. All those who are interested are invited to attend.

The English lecture “Is ‘No Religion’ the New Religion?” will be held in the lecture building of the Cluster of Excellence, room JO 101, Johannisstraße 4 in Münster at 6.15 pm and will present survey findings and other information on powerpoint slides. In a public book presentation on Tuesday, 2 May, Prof. Woodhead will discuss questions of religious plurality and interreligious theory with scholar of religion Prof. Dr. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Islamic theologian Prof. Dr. Mouhanad Khorchide. The event will be conducted in English in the lecture building of the Cluster of Excellence, room JO 101, Johannisstraße 4 in Münster from 11.15 pm to 12.45 am. Prof. Woodhead will also exchange views about the group of the “nones” in Europe and the USA with members of the Cluster of Excellence and scholars from across Europe and the USA in an interdisciplinary Blumenberg workshop on 4 and 5 May.

“Linda Woodhead distinguished herself with her ‘spiritual revolution’ theory”, says the speaker of the Cluster of Excellence, sociologist of religion Prof. Dr. Detlef Pollack. “With this she describes a structural change of religion in modern societies through which new individualistic and syncretistic religious forms gain in importance and increasingly supersede declining ecclesial ties.” Her book that aroused international interest, “The Spiritual Revolution” (co-written with Paul Heelas, 2005) is based on studies about Christian and alternative spirituality in England.

Discussing religious plurality with Schmidt-Leukel and Khorchide

“In her research Linda Woodhead is concerned with secularisation, religion and gender as well as the relationship of religion and emotion”, says Prof. Dr. Detlef Pollack. “This offers numerous intersections with the research at the Cluster of Excellence.” Her long experience in interdisciplinary research also makes Prof. Woodhead a valuable addition to the Cluster of Excellence. From 2007 until 2012, the new Blumenberg Visiting Professor was director of the UK’s

20m euro interdisciplinary “Religion and Society research programme” funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council. (ill/vvm)

Blumenberg Visiting Professor Linda Woodhead

Linda Woodhead, born in Somerset, England, in 1964 and is Professor of Sociology of Religion at Lancaster University. She holds honorary degrees from Uppsala, Zurich and Oslo. In 2013 she was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to higher education. Recently, the scholar was invited to the World Economic Forum summit in Davos as member of the Global Agenda Council on the Role of Faith. She has published several works on religion in modern societies, including “A Sociology of Religious Emotion” (co-authored with Ole Riis, 2010) and “That Was The Church That Was: How the Church of England Lost the English People” (2016). Prof. Woodhead studied Theology and Religious Studies at Cambridge University and specialised in the empirical study of culture, religion and values.

For the summer semester 2017, the Cluster of Excellence for the first time appointed two Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professors. Prof. Woodhead will be succeeded by ethnologist Prof. Dr. Thomas Hauschild from the University of Halle-Wittenberg in June and July. He will speak about “The Inevitableness of Religion” in a lecture series.

In the coming semesters renowned researchers from varying disciplines will be appointed to the Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professorship. The most recent Blumenberg Visiting Professor in Münster was the Würzburg legal scholar Prof. Dr. Horst Dreier, who spoke about challenges of the secular constitutional state in the winter semester 2016/2017. The Bochum historian Prof. Dr. Lucian Hölscher was the first visiting professor in the summer semester 2016, dealing with the Reformation anniversary in 2017 and with Protestant piety culture in Germany. (ill/vvm)

Visiting Professorship at the Cluster of Excellence named after – Hans Blumenberg

The renowned Münster philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996) was professor at the University of Münster from 1970 until his retirement in 1985. Through his publications, he significantly contributed to redefining the place of the modern age in the historico-scientific and philosophical discussion. He challenged the secularisation thesis predominant at that time, according to which theological patterns of interpretation had been persisting since the Middle Ages across the changeover to the modern age and into the modern state. In his main work, “The Legitimacy of the Modern Age” Blumenberg advocates to interpret the onset of the modern age as an act of human self-assertion against the theological claims for absoluteness of late Medieval thinking. Thus, in critical contrasting with philosophers Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) and Karl Löwith (1897-1973), he was crucial in shaping the secularisation debate that argued from the point of view of the history of ideas. This is considered a major contribution to the theory of historical periodisation and the theory of the modern age.

In his studies dealing with the history of concepts, of ideas, of philosophy and with anthropology, the philosopher also addressed the interpretation of myths and metaphors. For instance, he engaged in anecdotic and essayistic considerations about the theme of the lion. Author Sibylle Lewitscharoff picks up on this theme in her novel, “Blumenberg”. The scholar was a member of the Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur zu Mainz (academy of sciences

and literature), of the German Research Foundation's senate (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) and of the Senatskommission für Begriffsgeschichte (senate commission for the history of concepts), and he co-founded the research group "Poetik und Hermeneutik" (poetics and hermeneutics). As a young man, he had to stop studying Catholic theology in 1940 as, with a view to his mother's family, he was considered a "half-Jew" in National Socialism. He later studied philosophy, German and classical philology. (exc/vvm)

Pictures: Prof. Dr. Linda Woodhead (photo: Christine Baker-Parrish)

Contact:

Viola van Melis
Centre for Research Communication
of the Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics"
Johannisstraße 1
48143 Münster
Phone: 0251/83-23376
Fax: 0251/83-23246
religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de
www.religion-und-politik.de

Should you wish to unsubscribe to the press releases of the Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics", please send an e-mail to religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de.

The Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics" of WWU Münster

Some 200 academics from more than 20 disciplines of the humanities and social sciences and from 14 countries do research in the Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics" of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (WWU). They deal with the complex relationship of religion and politics across epochs and cultures: from the ancient pantheon and Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages and the early modern period to the current situation in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. It is nationally the largest research association of its kind and of the 43 clusters of excellence in Germany, it is the only one to deal with religions. The federal government and the state governments support the project in the second phase of the Excellence Initiative with 40.1 million euros from 2012 until 2018.