

## Press release

### **“Music was a rather controversial issue in world religions”**

**New series “Music and Religion” of the Cluster of Excellence in Münster with lectures and concerts – Recital with renowned baritone Benjamin Appl, Orthodox vespers and concert with music of the Islamic tradition – Researchers analyse music from antiquity up to the present**

**Münster, 18 April 2017 (exc)** According to researchers, music has played a central role, but also a controversial one in world religions from antiquity up to the present. “In rituals, the different forms of music served prayers, the creed, the community, religious experience and the reflection on faith. Above all, music could emotionalise – religious groups or scholars sometimes feared and fought this as a rival to their dogmas”, says Prof. Dr. Thomas Bauer, a specialist in Islamic studies, of the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” in Germany. The type of music often allows one to recognise religious currents: “The organ is played during service in some congregations of liberal Judaism, which is out of the question for orthodox congregations. In Christianity, vernacular chants only became a core element of the church rite through the Reformation. In Islam, music and dance are a characteristic religious practice in certain Sufi orders, while fundamentalist currents reject them as improper innovations.” The cultural scientist, Thomas Bauer, announced a lecture series “Music and Religion” including lectures and concerts. The first lecture will be held on 25 April.

The interdisciplinary lecture series at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” ranges from music in Judaism, Islam and Hinduism to Christian church music, the piano song of the 19th century and contemporary pop music. The scientific discussion is accompanied by experiences of the aesthetic: at a recital of the renowned baritone Benjamin Appl, at an Orthodox vespers with the Byzantine cantors’ choir from Munich, and at a concert of the ensemble Ayangil from Istanbul playing music of Islamic tradition. Admission is free. The lectures will be given by musicologists and scholars of religious and Islamic studies. They investigate the complex relationship of music and religion from antiquity until the present day, in Europe and North America, in India and in the Middle East.

“Religious traditions are just as multifaceted as their tonal elements”, explains musicologist Dr. Dominic Höink. “This ranges from monophonic chants like the Gregorian chants to highly artificial, polyphonic Mass compositions, and from the use of ritual instruments like the cymbals as used by the Copts to the melodic recitations of the Koran or the psalms in Islam or Judaism.” Sacred literatures are also liturgically arranged in Hinduism, says religious studies scholar Prof. Dr. Annette Wilke. “They are memorised, declaimed, sung, danced and performed. The texts thus become an event and create shared realms of experience.”

### **Music as a propaganda tool**

Every religion has a long history of music which did not proceed without conflicts, as liturgist Clemens Leonhard explains. “Music served as a propaganda tool even in antiquity. According to complaints of eastern Syriac contemporaries, for example, Jacob of Sarug from western Syriac tradition (who died in 521) composed hymnal texts in order to entice believers away from the doctrine of the eastern Syrian tradition. The eastern Syriac Narsai of Nisibis, in contrast, composed melodies to accompany texts from his tradition that he deemed correct.” In the late 4th century, the synod of Laodicea tried to prohibit self-composed hymns for the liturgy, only

approving the theological world of the Psalms. “But this did not curb the production of hymns, which have survived until today.”

Other historical examples: when secular melodies were used for clerical works in the 15th century, as in Guillaume Dufay’s *Missa se la face ay pale*, this brought critics like the theologian and musical scholar Conrad of Zabern to the scene. He spoke in favour of the choral and against the secular “cantus firmi” in “De mode bene cantandi” in 1474. In the 16th century, the Council of Trent addressed church music, calling for a better understandability of the text of the mass in polyphonic compositions – and demanding that “everything lascivious and impure” be excluded, according to Höink. Later, the 19th-century Cecilian Movement, a Catholic Church music restoration movement, rejected church music that had become too histrionic and aimed at returning to plainchants without instruments.

“Music was not least also a powerful means of spreading positions that were critical of the church”, says Höink. “This went so far that the Roman Inquisition concerned itself with Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Don Carlo* in 1868. There were concerns that the opera could ‘evoke unspeakable emotion, resentment and hate against the Inquisition and its servants’ according to the evaluator.” Today, according to Höink, downright anti-religious motifs can be found in pop, hip-hop and heavy metal music. “On the other hand, Christian groups use the same musical genres to spread their beliefs, as does the ‘Contemporary Christian music’ in the USA.”

### **Gods and angels make music**

Many visual representations and religious texts, in which even the gods themselves or the angels make music, show how highly religions have valued music in history, says Thomas Bauer. It is also part of the complex relationship with this art form that music with a religious content left the realm of the sacred in the course of history: “An early example is the 19th-century German *Lied*. It is a middle-class genre, first played in one’s own living room, later in the concert hall.” *Lieder* address not only love, nature and fate, but also religious issues, as in Schubert’s *Ave Maria*, Beethoven’s *Gellert Lieder* or the meditations of Peter Cornelius on the Lord’s Prayer. Both the *Lieder* and the masses were increasingly performed in secular settings, thus receiving even more publicity. “In the modern age, after all, music at times turns into religion itself, the enjoyment of art turns into prayer, and the secular venue turns into a temple.”

The lectures of the lecture series will be held on Tuesdays from 25 April to 18 July at 6.15 pm in lecture theatre F2 of the Fürstenberghaus at Domplatz 20-22 in Münster. The location of the performances will be the neighbouring Petrikirche. The series is organised by musicologist Dr. Dominik Höink, by Prof. Dr. Thomas Bauer and Dr. Monika Springberg-Hinsen, specialists of Islamic studies, by Catholic theologian Prof. Dr. Clemens Leonhard and by Viola van Melis, who is Head of the Centre for Research Communication at the Cluster of Excellence. The first lecture, entitled “‘Begreifen, was uns ergreift’. Das musikalische und das religiöse Erleben im Vergleich” (Understanding that which moves us. Comparing the musical and the religious experience) will be held by sociologist of religion Prof. Dr. Detlef Pollack on 25 April. (vvm)

**Picture:** Prof. Dr. Thomas Bauer (photo: Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”)

#### **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](mailto: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.