

Press release

Can people live without religion?

The renowned social and cultural anthropologist Thomas Hauschild will be the new Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor at the Cluster of Excellence in Münster – Lecture series on the “Inevitability of Religion” – First lecture on 26 June about religiosity in Southern Italy beyond established clichés

Münster, 19 June 2017 (exc) Whether the existence of religions is inevitable, is a question asked by the new “Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor” Prof. Dr. Thomas Hauschild in a public lecture series at the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”. In the lectures starting on Monday, June 26, the renowned social and cultural anthropologist will examine “whether human collectives can ultimately live without religion.” According to the scholar, “after decades of secularisation” religions have such a great influence on politics again that it is necessary to ask whether they are inevitable. Against this background, the academic, a member of the Heidelberg Academy of Science and Humanities, pleads for religious research that takes the subjective experience of religious believers seriously without abandoning scholarship’s neutral foundation.

In the first lecture of the series, the scholar will present the results of around 30 years of ethnological field research on religious practices in Southern Italy. Hauschild wants to “correct established clichés on religiosity in Southern Italy: in Central Europe, it is often considered as a primitive ‘belief’ or a cynical secularisation of the bureaucratic and political religion prescribed by the Vatican”. In fact the religious everyday life and festivities of the people in Southern Italy may “at best be aligned with the broadened concept of religion and culture used in ethnology and evolutionary anthropology”. The lecture is called “Kath’olos in Südtalien – Kirchliche und staatliche Politik im Stresstest der gelebten Religion (Kath’olos in Southern Italy – church and state politics under the stress test of religion)”. Two more lectures will follow, one on fetishism in colonial Melanesia and the artistic avant-garde of the early 20th century, and one on shamanism and neurobiology during the period preceding the revolutionary movements of 1848. The lectures will take place on Mondays between June 26 and July 10 2017, from 6.15 pm to 7.45 pm in the lecture building of the Cluster of Excellence, lecture hall JO 1, Johannisstraße 4 in Münster.

“Civil society is increasingly occupied by the sensitivities of religions”

The speaker of the Cluster of Excellence, sociologist of religion Prof. Dr. Detlef Pollack, emphasises that Thomas Hauschild is “a social and cultural anthropologist with original ideas” and owing to his wide range of research interests he can “be a particular source of inspiration for the interdisciplinary research at the Cluster of Excellence”. The findings of his field research and historical analyses are of great interest for many subjects at the Cluster of Excellence. “This offers opportunities to walk new paths in academic thinking about religious forms of sense and practices.” Among the Blumenberg visiting professor’s research focus areas are the inevitability of religions, cults of spirits, religious resources in imperial consumer societies and the religion of IS and Al Qaida terrorists.

In his research, Hauschild emphasises the significance of “materialistic explanations for religion that include scientific and sociological arguments”. According to the cultural anthropologist, these are all the more important “as they are increasingly unsettled by postmodern criticism and the self-assertive discourse of the protagonists of religions.” However, materialism should be able to co-exist with other religions within a state community “without too much friction”. “It is unclear whether this is possible, because civil society is increasingly occupied by the sensitivities of religions.”

Book on apparitions and cults of spirits

During his stay at Münster, the academic will work on a book on apparitions and cults of spirits. His aim is to “balance the knowledge about the historically-specific, social and political conditions of apparitions against the influence of rudimentary biological universals, that is the ‘protrusion of a spiritual realm into our world’, as described for example by the German poet and physician Justinus Kerner.”

Thomas Hauschild, born in Berlin in 1955, served as a professor for social and cultural anthropology at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. As a fellow or visiting professor he was active at the Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften at Vienna, the Institute for Advanced Study at Berlin (Wissenschaftskolleg), the Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie at Weimar. Thomas Hauschild has published numerous books, arousing academic and public interest, among them “Hexen” (Witches), “Der böse Blick” (The evil eye), “Magie und Macht in Italien” (English edition “Magic and Power in Italy”, 2010), “Ritual und Gewalt” (Ritual and Violence, 2008), and “Weihnachtsmann – Die wahre Geschichte” (Santa Claus – The True Story, 2012).

Other renowned researchers expected

In the coming semesters, other renowned researchers from varying disciplines will be appointed to the Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professorship. The Bochum historian Prof. Dr. Lucian Hölscher was the first visiting professor in the summer semester 2016. In Münster, he addressed the Protestant Reformation anniversary 2017 and the Protestant piety culture in Germany. In the winter semester 2016/2017, he was succeeded by the Würzburg legal scholar Prof. Dr. Horst Dreier, who focused on the challenges of the secular constitutional state during his stay at the Cluster of Excellence. The other Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor of the current summer semester, British sociologist of religion Prof. Dr. Linda Woodhead, discussed the question whether no religion is the “new religion”. (dak/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. Thomas Hauschild (photo: Franziska Richter)

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.