

> Focus: PEACE
From Antiquity to the Present Day

Press release

“Peace has only recently become the prime objective of politics”

Historian Hans-Ulrich Thamer on the history of peace politics and the peace movement to present day: potential for mobilisation in the face of growing feelings of threat – “Motto of the *Katholikentag* ‘Search for Peace’ is in the air” – Church and *Katholikentag* provided for mobilisation and continuity in the history of the movement – Symbols of peace such as the dove and the peace sign linked the diverse peace groups, whether communist, ecological or Christian – Münster conference and exhibition “Peace. From Antiquity to the Present Day” including research results

Münster, 9 May 2018 (exc) According to historians, the political goal of peace has never been as important as it is today. “For example, those who considered peace to be the most important political goal in 1913 belonged to a minority,” says historian Prof. Dr Hans-Ulrich Thamer of the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” before the 101st *Katholikentag*. The motto of the German Catholics Day, which will begin in Münster on Wednesday, is “Search for Peace”. “Today, on the other hand, peace is the number one expectation that the population has on politics. This is surprising because people in all epochs longed for peace and expressed it in many ways in art.” In Europe, the peace movement only gained weight after the atrocities of the Second World War. The positive view of peace only became the majority opinion with the peace movement of the 1980s. Today, according to Thamer, the peace movement is in a “latency phase”. “It is less visible, but there has always been ups and downs: should the international situation worsen and feelings of threat grow, the traditional stock can be activated. Peace demonstrations are likely if the fear grows.”

Protestant Church Congresses and *Katholikentage* in Germany have always contributed to the continuity of the peace movement, according to the historian. It is no coincidence that the upcoming *Katholikentag* goes by the motto “Search for Peace” and that exhibitions are dedicated to this theme. “The topic is in the wind; in the face of international crises, many feel war glooming. If this becomes more concrete, a new mobilisation is possible. That was unthinkable a few years ago.” However, the global political situation is perceived as much more complex than had been the case in the bipolar world view of the Cold War. In light of this “new complexity”, belief in the ability to implement peace has declined significantly. “The end of the Cold War had promised the transition to a peaceful world. The people of the peace movement had the feeling that their desire for peace was politically feasible. But the Gulf and Balkan Wars were already sobering, as are today’s asymmetric wars like the one in Syria.”

Posters of the peace movement: images of destruction, not peace

Whether the dove of peace, the mushroom cloud or the peace sign – the historian, who has specialised in the study of social movements, explains that the peace movement’s visual language, which is still known today, was of great importance for this social movement. The

visual language held the peace movement together because it consisted of very different actors – from communist to ecological to Christian groups. “The posters of the peace movement, which was only loosely organised, were the common sign of identification. They created a minimal consensus and repeated one theme: the threat and destruction of the peaceful world.”

The dove of peace, however, which is still very much present today, was only one of many symbols at that time, according to the historian. “Only in retrospect was it assigned central importance.” More often, the posters showed pictures from the Vietnam War, from Hiroshima and other destroyed cities. “Artists and peace actors of the entire 20th century rarely portrayed peace itself, on the other hand. As the exhibition ‘Peace. From Antiquity to the Present Day’ shows, this stands in strong contrast to earlier epochs, in which the ideals of peace of the time were illustrated in various allegories and symbols.”

“Show your outrage”

On 24 May, historian Hans-Ulrich Thamer will give a lecture on the history of the peace movement under the title “Entrüstet Euch: Frieden und soziale Bewegungen” (Show your outrage: peace and social movements). He will speak at the conference “PEACE. Theories, Images and Strategies from Antiquity to the Present Day”, which is part of the exhibition project “Peace. From Antiquity to the Present Day”. The exhibition can currently be seen at five locations in Münster. Under the title “Wege zum Frieden” (Paths to Peace), the LWL State Museum shows pictures of peace and peace efforts throughout history, including numerous posters of the peace movement.

In reference to the motto “Search for Peace” of the 101st *Katholikentag*, the scholar explains: “The commitment of Christian groups has given continuity to the peace movement to this day.” In the rallies, discussion forums and peace prayers at Protestant Church Congresses and *Katholikentage*, more listeners were reached than at any other event. “Especially in the 1980s, they were important mobilisation places of the peace movement, which became a mass movement in reaction to the NATO Double-Track Decision. It set a more positive view of peace against the glorification of war, which was still extreme in the western countries at that time, and slowly brought about a social change in awareness.” (sca/vvm)

Conference “PEACE. Theories, Images and Strategies from Antiquity to the Present Day”

At the conference of the Cluster of Excellence, which will be held from 22 to 25 May 2018 in Münster, internationally renowned researchers will address the question in 21 lectures of why people throughout the ages wanted peace, but never succeeded in securing it in the long term. On the basis of many historical examples of European history, they address strategies, behavioural patterns and processes with which people from antiquity to the present day have tried to establish and maintain peace. The researchers focus on how many of the images, rituals and strategies have remained valid over time. At the same time, they show changes typical of their time and their causes. All lectures will be held in the auditorium of LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur at Domplatz 10 in Münster.

Over the next few weeks, the Cluster of Excellence will present key topics of the conference on the Internet and in the media in multimedia formats. The conference is part of the **exhibition “Peace. From Antiquity to the Present Day”**, which will present the topics in a variety of exhibits at five locations in the city of the Peace of Westphalia from 28 April to 2 September 2018. The

idea and basic concept of the exhibition project are the result of the many years of research at the Cluster of Excellence on the topic of peace. (asc/vvm)

Pictures: Fig. 1: Poster “No new nuclear missiles. No implementation of the NATO decision”, Committee for Peace, Disarmament and Cooperation (KOFAZ), c. 1980-1982 (Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, photo: I. Desnica), Fig. 2 Prof. Dr Hans-Ulrich Thamer (photo: Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”/Holger Arning)

Please note: *The free publication of the press photos is only valid for the current coverage of the exhibition until 30 September 2018 and only with full details of the photo credits. The works of art may only be reproduced completely and unchanged.*

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The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of the University of 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 University of Münster. 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.