

## Press release

### **“Catholics then, Muslims now: the accusation of isolation”**

**52nd Meeting of German Historians in Münster puts the concept of religious “parallel societies” to the test – Debate about “Catholics then – Muslims today” – Contemporary historians: both groups were exposed to similar feelings of foreignness – Podium by the Cluster of Excellence and the Center for Religion and Modernity, with Wilfried Loth, Schirin Amir-Moazami, Marc Breuer, Levent Tezcan**

**Münster, 11. September 2018 (exc)** Catholics then, Muslims today: at the 52nd Meeting of German Historians at the end of September in Münster, historians will put the concept of the religious “parallel society” to the test. “The accusation of isolation into a ‘parallel society’ that Muslims have been hearing in Germany for decades hit another religious group in the 19th century – that of Catholics, which the Protestant majority found similarly foreign,” explain the historians Prof. Dr. Thomas Großbölting and Dr. Daniel Gerster of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” and the Center for Religion and Modernity (CRM) of the University of Münster. “Then as now, ‘parallel society’ serves more as a political battle concept than as a category of analysis: historical research was able to prove that the Catholic milieu was far from living as isolated as the Protestant majority assumed at the time.” According to the researchers who are organising the debate “Catholics then – Muslims today. Religious ‘parallel societies’ in comparison” at the Meeting of German Historians on 27 September, this makes it all the more important to learn from historical research and to examine the current use of the concept.

“With the term ‘parallel society’, the German majority society has for decades been expressing the foreignness it feels towards migrants and also its ideas of the ‘right’ society,” says contemporary historian Thomas Großbölting. “Unfamiliar religious rituals and an enormous educational deficit, outdated and anti-modern and, what is more, committed to a foreign power: what Muslims are often accused of today is what the Catholic part of the population was reproached with in the 19th and early 20th centuries,” the scientists explain. “In both cases, the prejudices boil down to the respective religious community forming a ‘parallel society’ which cannot be integrated or is perhaps even unwilling to integrate.” In its structure, the criticism of Muslims by the majority society resembles the earlier reservations towards Catholics. However, there are also differences that must always be considered in the historical comparison of the milieus: “At about 30 per cent, Catholics were a significantly larger minority than the approximately 5 per cent of Muslims in Germany today,” says Daniel Gerster. “In addition, Muslims bring their immigration history and often do not speak German as their mother tongue.”

The interdisciplinary debate “Catholics then – Muslims today. Religious ‘parallel societies’ in comparison” at the 52nd Meeting of German Historians on Thursday, 27 September at 11.00 am at the Fürstenberghaus in Münster will look into the role of religion for social cohesion. The historian Prof. Dr. Wilfried Loth from the University of Duisburg-Essen, the scholar of Islamic studies Prof. Dr. Schirin Amir-Moazami from Freie Universität Berlin, the sociologist of religion Prof. Dr. Marc Breuer from the Catholic University North Rhine-Westphalia in Paderborn and the scholar of religious studies PD Dr. Levent Tezcan from Ruhr-Universität Bochum will discuss the

topic. The event will be chaired by the Hamburg historian and journalist Sven Felix Kellerhoff.  
(sca/vvm)

### **Info box: “Divided Societies” – 52nd Meeting of German Historians**

The 52nd Meeting of German Historians at the University of Münster from 25 to 28 September will deal with “Divided Societies”. Some 3,500 scientists from Germany and abroad will exchange views on current research topics in more than 90 sections at Europe’s largest humanities congress. Guest speakers will be Wolfgang Schäuble, Christopher Clark, Herfried Münkler, Ulrich Raulff, Aladin El-Mafaalani and Birgit Schäßler. The Netherlands as guest country will be represented by parliamentary president Khadija Arib and author Geert Makb.

In numerous case studies, the sections will address the social, economic, religious or ethnic divisions challenging not only the present but also earlier epochs. Among the topics discussed will be, for example, refugee debates from antiquity to the present; the social, economic and legal exclusion of certain groups occurring in different epochs; the question whether the Peace of Westphalia is a model for the Middle East; economic divisions in Germany, for example between “Hartz IV families and helicopter parents”; or the political instrumentalisation of historical images in today’s divided societies such as Catalonia, Scotland and Kosovo.

Organisers are the Association of German Historians (VHD), the Association of German History Teachers (VGD) and the University of Münster (WWU). The convention dates back to the “First Meeting of German Historians” in Munich in 1893, is held every two years and is devoted to pressing questions in history and society. (vhd/sca/vvm)

**Please note:** Those who are interested and the press may register at [www.historikertag.de](http://www.historikertag.de).

**Images:** Prof. Dr. Thomas Großbölting (Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”/Julia Holtkötter); Dr. Daniel Gerster (Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”/Martin Zaune)

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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, the cooperation partner of the 52nd Meeting of German Historians in 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.

The **Verband der Historikerinnen Deutschlands e. V.** (Association of German Historians) represents the interests of field of history to social organisations and state authorities, supports the international networking of history, advocates the promotion of young scholars, and organises the biennial Meeting of German Historians. The VHD currently has 3,300 members. The Meeting of German Historians is organised by the VHD and the Verband der Geschichtslehrer Deutschlands e. V. (German Association of History Teachers).