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Photo: Philipp Steinkellner

For the Ransom of the Soul

IWM Lecture in Human Sciences by **Peter Brown**, October 15 / 16 / 18, 2012

Without a doubt one of the most exciting events at the IWM last autumn was Peter Brown's series of three lectures in October, which attracted a large and diverse audience from across the academic world. Entitled "For the Ransom of the Soul: Wealth, Death, and Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages", Brown gave the 2012 IWM Lectures in Human Sciences, which have welcomed—since their inauguration in 2000—prominent speakers from various disciplines. Brown, Professor Emeritus of History at Princeton University, added new and exciting dimensions to the format by shifting the focus to the history of Late Antiquity, a field of study which he himself put on the map of scholarship. Even the uninitiated know Peter Brown for having given intellectual respectability to the notion of Late Antiquity as a transitional period that stands on its own, no longer fully part of Antiquity but not yet integrated into the Middle Ages.

In his IWM Lectures, Brown presented insights gained from his recent work on religious beliefs and rituals connected with the memory of the dead in Late Antiquity, together with related concepts of poverty, wealth, and alms-giving. A theme that cut across all three lectures was the impact of Early Christianity on these beliefs and rituals and the dramatic transformations in profound human perceptions of life, death, and the afterlife.

The first lecture, "'Treasure in Heaven' and the Memory of the Dead in Early Christianity," examined the conviction that religious giving (of money) in memory of the dead serves the purpose of "ransoming the soul"—an idea that is both Jewish and Christian. Hence the idea of treasure in heaven—religious giving in this life brings benefits in the next. Participatory rituals around the idea that the living can

intervene in the world of the dead were shared throughout the Christian world—from Christian communities in Rome to the Manicheans in Mesopotamia.

The second lecture, "'Forgive Us Our Sins': Alms, Expiation, and Afterlife in the North Africa of St. Augustine," focused on the era of St. Augustine (354–430), one of the main figures in Western Christianity. It was around this time that the notion arose the poor were the primary objects of Christian religious charity. This form of alms-giving marked a major innovation on the preceding pagan period, when secular giving was directed to one's fellow-citizens and poverty as such providing no entitlement. St. Augustine's view that alms-giving atoned for one's sins and was obligatory for Christians was very much an expression of this radically new notion.

The third lecture, "'Who Cease to Think about the Last Judgment': Penance and the Other World from Salvian to Columbanus," shifted from St. Augustine's North Africa to Gaul in the 5th and 6th centuries. Brown's case study of Lérins showed how the questions of the previous lectures were addressed in the very specific context of a monastic community.

Peter Brown's considerations on the "ransom of the soul" provided another dimension to his previous work on the Christianization of the Roman world (see for example *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World*, 1995). Indeed, the themes of death and afterlife have preoccupied him for decades. In 1976, he wrote that "much of medieval history is inconceivable without the preliminary decision to allow the dead into a central position in worship" (*Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity*, 1976). What was new in Brown's IWM Lectures was the idea that wealth and religious giving, in all their complexity, provided the

possibility for the living to intervene in the world of the dead and, ultimately, for creating a link between heaven and earth. ◀

Clemena Antonova

Clemena Antonova is lecturer in Art History and Theory at the American University in Bulgaria. Currently, she is Lise Meitner Visiting Fellow at the IWM, where she pursues a project on Pavel Florensky and the nature of Russian religious philosophy.

IWM Lectures in Human Sciences

The IWM Lectures in Human Sciences were launched in 2000 on the occasion of the 100th birthday of Hans Georg Gadamer, supporter of the Institute since its inception. Selected lectures are published in English (Harvard University Press, Cambridge), German (Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin) and Polish (ZNAK Publishers, Krakow, and Kurhaus Publishers, Warsaw).

October 15/16/18, 2012

Peter Brown: "For the Ransom of the Soul: Wealth, Death and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages"

- "'Treasure in Heaven' and Memory of the Dead in Early Christianity"
- "'Forgive us our sins.' Alms, expiation and the afterlife in the Africa of Saint Augustine"
- "'Who cease to think about the Last Judgment.' Penance and the Other World from Salvian to Columbanus"

November, 2013

Jan-Werner Müller: "We the People: On Populism and Democracy"

Previous Speakers:

Vincent Descombes
Zygmunt Bauman
Claus Offe
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Abraham B. Yehoshua
Cornelia Klinger
Paul Ricœur
Charles Taylor

Auf der Suche nach Rechtfertigung

Jan Patočka Gedächtnisvorlesung von **Martin Walser**, 23. November 2012, Palais Liechtenstein

Mit einem Vortrag des deutschen Schriftstellers Martin Walser gedachte das IWM zum 24. Mal in Folge des tschechischen Philosophen Jan Patočka.

Martin Walser, Jahrgang 1927, zählt zu den wichtigsten deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsautoren. Als streitbarer Beobachter, Chronist und Kritiker begleitet er seit über fünf Jahrzehnten die Wege und Irrwege unserer Gesellschaft. Er studierte Literaturwissenschaft, Philosophie und Geschichte in Regensburg und Tübingen und promovierte zu Franz Kafka. Walser schrieb mehr als 20 Romane sowie zahlreiche Novellen, Theaterstücke und Essays. 1998 wurde ihm der Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels verliehen.

Seine Vorlesung am 23. November wurde eingeleitet von dem Rechtswissenschaftler Dieter Simon, Präsident des IWM. Im Mittelpunkt der von Martin Walser vorgetragenen Überlegungen stand das Problem der Rechtfertigung, mit dem er sich seit einiger Zeit auseinandersetzt.

„Ich war immer ein Leser. Also bin ich auch ein Bewusstseinstheater, in dem die Texte aus 2000 Jahren nie ganz verstummen wollen.“ sagte Walser einmal. Im Palais Liechtenstein konnte ihn das Publikum im Dialog mit Paulus und Augustinus, Hölderlin und Nietzsche erleben. Walser ist auch ein Leser der Religion: Für ihn ist sie eine „Ausdrucksart wie andere, wie Literatur, Musik, Malerei. Ich lese Religion als Literatur. Dass Texte, die für uns, 'nur' noch zur Religion gehören, Dichtung sind, um es im Betriebsdeutsch zu sagen: große Dichtung, das kann man doch noch sagen. Die Psalmen. Das Buch Hiob. Das Weihnachtsevangelium. Andere lassen mich wissen: Religion, das war einmal. Es ist eine eher unglückliche Entwicklung, dass Religion etwas

geworden ist, was nicht mehr ohne Kirchliches gedacht wird. Wer sich heute fast instinktiv erhaben fühlt über alles Religiöse, weiß vielleicht nicht, was er verloren hat. Polemisch gesagt: Rechtfertigung ohne Religion wird zur Rechthaberei. Sachlich gesagt: Verarmt zum Rechthaben.“ ◀

red

Jan Patočka Gedächtnisvorlesung

Seit seiner Gründung widmet sich das IWM dem Werk des tschechischen Philosophen und Bürgerrechtlers Jan Patočka (1907–1977) und veranstaltet seit 1987 alljährlich eine Vorlesung zu seinem Gedächtnis. Ausgewählte Vorlesungen sind im Wiener Passagen Verlag erschienen.

23. November 2012

Martin Walser: „Auf der Suche nach Rechtfertigung“

7. November 2013

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