

The Ruhr is a centre of theology in education and research. Protestant and Catholic theology are equally represented at all three universities of the region. All three universities have departments of New Testament studies.

“New Testament at Ruhr” (“Neues Testament an der Ruhr”) is a research network of the region’s New Testament departments, where they conduct joint research embedded in the institutional framework of University Alliance Ruhr Metropolis.

New Testament at Ruhr outlines research projects that are subsequently studied in workshops and symposiums. The results are eventually published. Promoting and supporting early career researchers is one of the network’s main objectives. The projects are specifically devised to utilise the three departments’ unique competencies, which are accumulated in a broad spectrum at the three universities and which address topics that are visibly linked to the religious, social, and cultural situation in the Ruhr area.

Context:

In Ruhr, Germany’s largest metropolitan area and one of the largest ones in Europe, where cities merge with cities to form one giant megalopolis, approx. a hundred (at present, the list is constantly growing) New Testament scholars, including assistant professors and PhD students, are researching into early Christian resp. biblical texts, early Jewish documents, and other ancient sources and related topics. New Testament scholars in the Ruhr area are involved in major projects conducted by international New Testament research institutions and collaborate in networks that stretch far beyond the European borders. Representing their respective research institutions, each member of the network brings his or her “unique selling proposition” with regard to New Testament research to the table. In Bochum, for example, the New Testament scholars collaborate in several large international commentary projects, and, first and foremost, maintain close ties with local institutes researching into religious history (KHK; CERES) as well as with the newly established Centre for Mediterranean Studies. This means that the Ruhr institutions integrate traditional scientific research within clearly defined limits of disciplines and subjects on the one hand and innovative structures of the “new university” on the other hand.

Another “unique selling proposition” is linked to the Ruhr location itself. According to many, this is the region where the social issues affecting Germany and Europe in the 21st century are defined. In terms of religion, there is hardly any other place in Europe where such a plethora of denominations, religions, and forms of piety co-exists on such close quarters and where positive and negative freedom of religion is practised in such diverse ways. This is an extraordinary challenge for the established churches and for scientific theology.

All these factors contributed to the idea of a permanent research and project group for all New Testament scholars in the Ruhr region, which was born following an initial discussion among Prof Dr Markus Tiwald (Essen), Prof Dr Thomas Söding, Prof Dr Peter Wick, and Prof v. Bendemann (all three from Bochum) that took place in Bochum in 2009. The group was constituted by a committee of colleagues from the universities in Bochum, Duisburg-Essen, and Dortmund who convened in November 2010 in Bochum.

Under the name of “Neues Testament an der Ruhr” (“New Testament at Ruhr”, NTR), the group pursues its objective of continuous growth and plans to hold regular meeting in November every year, in order to lead in-depth discussions on articles and lectures and to exchange opinions and news from a professional perspective regarding scientific developments as well as recent changes and trends observed at the universities and within society in the Ruhr area. The ultimate goal is not to agree on one joint methodological and scientific programme; rather, we are aiming at preserving the multi-perspective approach of our diverse provenances and main areas of research. This means NTR is a ‘traditional’ “network”.

The annual conferences will be themed around one subject, taking up and continuing contemporary issues that are relevant for international discourses in New Testament research. At the same time, the themes chosen for the conferences are meant to be rendered pertinent to current social, political, and religious resp. ecclesiastical developments in the Ruhr area.

Accordingly, the first annual conference in November 2010 was dedicated to the theme “Theology in the City” (cf. lecture by Reinhard von Bendemann: “Jesus and the City”).