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Conference addresses charisma - from Mother Theresa to Sarah Palin

Posted on Wednesday 1st June 2011

What is charisma and how does it affect religion, politics and modern celebrity culture? These are among the questions that will be discussed at a major conference hosted by the Department of Political Science and International Studies (POLSIS) at the University of Birmingham on Friday 3 June.

The 'Charisma - After Weber' International Conference will look at issues as varied as the cult of personality in totalitarian societies and charismatic figures in religion. Gisela Stuart MP will open the conference with an address on charisma in contemporary politics.

Charisma Studies is a growing area of research attracting the attention of scholars from various academic disciplines both in Social Sciences and Humanities, such as Sociology, Politics, Theology, English, Film, Television, History, Psychology, and Business and Management.

A renowned expert in Mother Teresa, Dr Gëzim Alpion, who has organised the conference, explains: *"Charisma has a relevance to a wide range of fields including political leadership, religion, business management and celebrity culture. The fact that the same conference can include presentations on Jyoti Basu, Lee Kuan Yew, Sarah Palin and Mother Theresa and literary characters like Beowulf and Malcolm Tucker shows how broad the study of charisma is. It is hoped that the conference will identify new trends in the study of Charisma."*

Presenters will cover history, literature, popular culture and religion over the course of the day. The first session focuses on religious charisma with the other two looking at politics and mediated leadership.

Dr Daniel Whisker from the University of Birmingham's Sociology Programme in POLSIS, who is presenting on Sarah Palin, says: *"There are times in modern politics, society and culture when the ancient powers of Charisma still hold sway, and it is important that we as social scientists understand where these forces come from, how they appear in the media and what purposes they can be made to serve. This conference is a timely chance to reassess Charisma's continuing role in our accelerated world."*

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Notes to Editors

Dr Gëzim Alpion is Lecturer in Sociology in the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham. His works include '*Vouchers*', *'Foreigner Complex: Essays and Fiction about Egypt'*, *'Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?'* and *'If Only the Dead Could Listen'*. Alpion's controversial study *'Can Humans Know God? The Mother Teresa Conundrum'* will be released in 2013.

Charisma - After Weber International Conference
Friday 03 June 2011
Time: 09:00 to 18:30
Venue: European Research Institute Building (G51) University of Birmingham

The Department of Political Science and International Studies at Birmingham hosts the 'Charisma – After Weber' International Conference, an excellent opportunity to evaluate and critique Max Weber's contribution to Charisma Studies.

Charisma Studies is a growing area of research attracting the attention of scholars from various academic disciplines both in Social Sciences and Humanities, such as Sociology, Politics, Theology, English, Film, Television, History, Psychology, and Business and Management. The organizers of the event wish to capitalize on this growth area at Birmingham University, other UK universities and overseas by bringing together Charisma scholars to evaluate Max Weber's contribution to Charisma Studies and contest some of his conclusions. The Conference will serve as a launching pad for high-profile Charisma experts and early career researchers to showcase their latest publications and work in progress. All the speakers will present by invitation.

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