

From 10 to 12 September Melk Abbey will become the centre for an exclusive conference. Nobel prize laureates and "Alchemist" Paulo Coelho will discuss both spirituality and wisdom.

## SEARCH FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE

*By Susanne Bobek*

A man, a woman and the search for a meaningful life. Andreas Salcher, management consultant, co-founder of the "Sir Carl Popper School for the Highly Gifted", and Gundula Schatz, biotechnologist, have set their sights high with their Waldzell Institute.

They hope to raise the importance of the awareness question as a social issue, for "an increasing number of people lose their jobs early in life and are then confronted with a personal crisis". The idea of creating an international wisdom forum at Melk Abbey has been very well received. Provincial governor, Erwin Pröll, favours and supports the project - and other sponsors have come forward too.

The idea to gain the Brazilian writer, **Paulo Coelho**, for the meeting, was an ambitious aim. The Austrian ambassador delivered the invitation personally in Brazil at the end of 2002. In April 2003 Andreas Salcher and Gundula Schatz enjoyed the privilege of spending a weekend with the author of "The Alchemist" and "The Road to Santiago" at his home in the South of France. At first he did not agree, but questioned us very closely. He dislikes conferences and lectures and does not like the word "wisdom". However, after a while the idea began to intrigue him and the dialog with high-ranking scientists and dignitaries of different religions was set in motion. The list of speakers indeed reads like a report of Who is Who:

**Shirin Ebadi**, present holder of the Peace Nobel Prize, accepted the invitation promptly. Stunning photos of Melk Abbey shown to her in Teheran may also have motivated her.

**Günter Blobel**, laureate of the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1999, will visit from the USA. Blobel donated the majority of his prize money for the reconstruction of the synagogue and the Frauenkirche in Dresden.

**Kary B. Mullis**, laureate of the Nobel Prize for chemistry and "inventor" of the genetic fingerprint, will also attend.

**Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, Hungarian, professor of psychology at the University of Chicago and the world's leading researcher into the study of what makes people truly happy, satisfied and fulfilled, and discoverer of the "Flow-Effect" – the phenomenon of complete loss of the awareness of time under extreme stress. He cancelled a Harvard seminar to attend the Waldzell Meeting: "If I would come, what should I do?" At Melk there will be no lectures, no power point presentations. The central focus will be on discussion and on the lives and experiences of the speakers, such as the extraordinary life of **Carl Djerassi**, the "father of the pill".

**David J. Goldberg**, Senior Rabbi of the Liberal Synagogue of London, combines traditional Jewish wisdom with cosmopolitanism. His commentaries in The Times, The Observer and the Independent newspapers, continually cause a sensation.

Also **Stephan Rechtschaffen**, physician, founder of Omega and pioneer of the Wellness movement, has agreed to attend. Omega is the most important institute for holistic learning in the USA. Rechtschaffen's most famous book "Timeshifting" is a plea for a new treatment of time in the age of "time poverty".

**Anton Zeilinger**, quantum theorist, will also join the meeting: "The world is everything that is the case, and also everything that can be the case."

Both Göttweig and Melk lie on the Road to Santiago. It took Gundula Schatz and Andreas Salcher a day to experience this part of the road that has not been sign-posted yet.