

How Austrians live and what they believe

European Forum for Teachers of Religion (EFTRE) Religion in modern Austrian Culture.

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1. The Sociology of religion in Austria is flourishing.

The Sociology of religion in Austria is flourishing. A survey that stretches back over forty years is available. The long-term project was started in 1970 and is entitled “Religion in the life of Austrians”. The survey has been conducted every ten years.¹ In addition, I have conducted three Gender studies’ surveys in 1992, 2002 and 2012. Their main topic was not religion but gender roles and their development over twenty years.² Among the personal items there were a lot related to religion and religious organisations. Furthermore, the results of the European Value System Study are helpful. Austria took part in this longitudinal study in 1991, then 1999 and 2008.³

It was a time-sensitive decision to analyse Muslims in Austria within a special sample in 2010. That made it possible to have a look at the growing cultural tensions between some Austrians and Muslim immigrants, who came in the last decades to Austria, for instance from Anatolia in Turkey. Demonstrations by anti-Islamic groups in all European countries are signs of these tensions. We wanted to know more about the different generations of Muslims living in Austria: Are there changes in their belief system and life-style from the first through the following generations?

In my lecture I will make some remarks on the three following issues:

1. The Catholic Church in Austria in going through a time of a deep transformation. To belong to the Catholic Church today is not a matter of fate, but of choice. The result of that choice is a multi-coloured society with very different types of belief and

¹ Zulehner, Paul M.: Verbundung. Kirchen im weltanschaulichen Pluralismus. Religion im Leben der Menschen 1970-2010, Ostfildern ²2011.

² Zulehner, Paul M./Steinmair-Pösel, Petra: Gleichstellung in der Sackgasse, Wien-Graz 2012.

³ The data of all studies and the questionnaires are available at <http://www.zulehner.org/site/forschung>

commitment. Most people nowadays belong to the sceptical type. A multi-coloured society is not a secularized one.

2. Many Muslims live in Austria just as in other European countries. From generation to generation their belief-system is deeply changing. They are suffering heavy modernisation stress.

3. Finally let me make some remarks about the challenge presented the Christian Churches by the refugees who have come since 2015 to Europe, and more will come in the next years as well.

Catholic Church in transformation

I will start with an historical consideration. We can better understand the ideological situation in Austria if we know how it has developed over the last centuries.

2. The ideological field in Austria is in transition. The Constantine Era is definitively over.

There can be no doubt: The ideological field in Austria is in transition. The era in which Christianity in its Catholic variation was the only permitted religion is definitively over. In that time religion and state were deeply interwoven. Whoever wanted to be a citizen in that “pretend-Christian” (“christentümlichen”) culture had to be a Christian. To belong to the Church and to be a Christian was “fate”.

That situation was sharpened in the time after the Reformation in 1517. The Peace-agreement from Augsburg in 1555 laid down the rule: “Cuius regio eius et religio.” (He who reigns decides the religion of his subjects.) The Emperor decided to which Christian confession his subjects had to belong. The Habsburgs were Catholic. Therefore, Austria’s citizens had to be catholic or leave the country. Anyone who resisted was sentenced to death. Later, many Protestants were expelled from Austria.

3. The dirty thirty-year-war between the Christian Confessions damaged the reputation of Christianity in Europe deeply. Christianity fought a war with Christianity.(The same happens nowadays: Islam is at war with Islam - Navid Kermani)

The so-called Thirty-Year-War from 1618 to 1648 had enormous consequences for the religious dimension of the European cultures. This dirty war was a war of Christianity against Christianity itself. The reputation not only of Christianity, but of religion in general was profoundly damaged. At that time the famous French thinker Voltaire tried to establish a philosophical religion for all mankind –without Confessions with blood on their hands. And a few years later, d’Alembert – again in France – drew up a European atheism. Atheism is a child of Christianity, a reaction to its barbarity.

It is a pity that mankind does not learn its historical lessons. Because now, more than four hundred years later, once again one of the big world religions has become its own enemy. Islam is at war with Islam. This is a disaster for the worldwide reputation of Islam. And again, this is a pity, for religion in general.

4. "From fate to choice" (Peter L. Berger): Thanks to a benign secularisation of state-power, peace and religious freedom were gained.

To gain peace in Europe, political and religious power were made separate. Religion lost political power as an instrument in the battle for truth. The state was freed from bloody religious confrontations. Peace became possible. This separation we can term "benign secularisation". I have borrowed this concept from the Hungarian psychoanalyst Michael Balint who speaks about "malignant and benign regression". The separation of state and church was not only the basis for peace in the countries, but prepared the modern idea of religious freedom as a human right.

In modern cultures, to belong to a religion is no longer "fate". Everybody can choose his or her belief system, a religious organisation to belong to and the degree of participation and commitment.

5. For this choice gratifications are decisive, not irritations.

Therefore, for the traditional Churches in Europe nowadays, it is very important to find out what the arguments are in deciding whether to enter a religious community or to reduce their commitment or to leave the community. In the last twenty to thirty years, many experts have been of the opinion that the choice for or against a religious commitment is steered by irritations. Many Catholic theologians have blamed the Church itself for the galloping decrease in members. They argued, that Catholic Church stands for a sexual neurosis. The Catholic Church discriminates against women. It does not appreciate participation, but has an authoritarian style of leadership. All in all, many perceive the Catholic Church as pre-modern. The Catholic Church (I don't include here other Christian Churches) is simply "out" for the young generation. Experts who followed these arguments demanded reforms.

A glance at the Protestant Sister Church can be helpful. Protestant Churches do not have the same irritations as the Catholic Church. Women can become pastors. Protestant communities have a democratic culture to come to their decisions. The Protestants in general are more modern than the Catholics. But at the same time, more members leave their Churches, the commitment is decreasing much quicker than in the Catholic Church.

Against this background, experts have changed their theory about religious choice. Now they assume that in the main, gratifications are decisive, not irritations. A person, who has attractive gratifications at hand, chooses a religious community more often than a person without such gratifications. Gratification means: I am gaining something for my life from religion. Religion is important for me when I suffer and look for consolation. I appreciate the rites-of-passage: when a child is born, a loving couple is married or when a beloved person dies. Many support Churches not only because of their spiritual richness, but also their social commitment. Therefore, Pope Francis for many modern people has a great reputation and amplifies good standing of the Church.

6. The fact, that citizens can choose their own religiosity, leads not to a secularised, but to an ideologically pluralised (multi-colored) society.

In the nineteen seventies, many sociologists of religion were sure, that modern cultures would be cultures without Churches, religions and God. They foresaw a development from a mono-colored religious to a mono-colored secularised, atheistic culture. But their prediction has not come true. The ending of the pre-modern religious culture didn't lead to an atheistic, secularised culture. Modernisation produces pluralisation. I call this process "Verbuntung" (colorisation). Peter L. Berger, a former advocate of the theory of secularisation, has given his brand new book the title: "The many Altars of modernity. Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age."

7. At first glance, every individual is sociologically a special case. However, there are common characteristics between the individuals. That makes it possible, to categorize them into different types. In respect to religiosity, we were able to identify four types: the churchly, the religious, the skeptical and the secular.

My own data about religion in Europe and in Austria confirm the theory that pluralisation is typical for modern cultures. I will show this with results from my own research I have conducted in Austria over forty years.

These are the data which I used to form a socio-religious typology. They are taken from the research-project "Religion in the life of Austrians". In a cluster analysis I included items about what Austrians believe and how they commit themselves to Church life. Here follow some examples. The items refer to personal religiosity, religious practice and commitment:

- I am a religious person.
- I pray often.
- If I do not succeed to know God and to love him, my life will be meaningless.
- I do not care if there is a God.
- Attends mass every Sunday.
- You can be a good Christian without attending Sunday mass.

The second group contains items about Christian belief:

- There is a God, who revealed himself in Jesus.
- The resurrection of Christ gives meaning to my life.
- The future lies in the kingdom of God, which Jesus proclaimed.

TABLE 1: Correlations

| | secular | sceptical | religious | churchly | all |
|---|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----|
| I am a religious person. | 19% | 70% | 89% | 94% | 68% |
| I pray often. | 2% | 30% | 65% | 86% | 42% |
| If I do not succeed to know God and to love him, my life will be meaningless. | 2% | 12% | 69% | 85% | 38% |
| I do not care if there is a God. | 37% | 9% | 7% | 2% | 12% |
| | | | | | |
| There is a God, who revealed himself in Jesus. | 13% | 59% | 82% | 82% | 55% |
| The resurrection of Christ gives meaning to my life. | 5% | 41% | 75% | 78% | 42% |
| The future lies in the kingdom of God, which Jesus proclaimed. | 6% | 44% | 77% | 81% | 45% |
| | | | | | |
| Attends mass every Sunday. | 1% | 14% | 38% | 88% | 29% |
| You can be a good Christian without attending Sunday mass. | 88% | 86% | 93% | 6% | 77% |

- The table shows that the *churchly persons* have high percentages not only in relation to the religious items, but also on Church commitment. They attend mass every Sunday and think that without going to mass on Sunday you cannot be a good Christian. These persons are the devoted Church members. The socio-religious dimension is extremely strong.
- For the *religious type* Church commitment is not necessary. These people do not go to Church on Sundays. They are convinced that you can be a good Christian without going to Sunday mass. They live a privatised religiosity outside the Church.
- The *secular type* tends to be atheistic. They do not care if there is a god. Conducting a meaningful life for them has no relation to a god. They do not pray or go to Sunday service. They do not accept the Church’s doctrine about Jesus Christ.
- The *sceptical type* differs from the secular. Most of the sceptical feel they are religious. A third of them often pray. Half of them accept the Church’s teaching about Jesus Christ.

8. Within the last forty years, the churchly and the religious type have decreased. On the other hand, the number of secular and sceptical people has increased. The most probable type to belong to in modern Austrian culture is the sceptical one, which is characterised by doubt. The French sociologist Daniele Hervieu-Leger coined for them the term *pelerine* (pilgrim).

The following table shows a creeping shift over the last forty years from the religious and the churchly type not only to the sceptical, but also in part to the secular type. Nevertheless, no single type disappears. A modern citizen’s beliefs are now deinstitutionalised and “de-churched; instead, these beliefs are personalised. For many, this personalisation does not lead to atheism or secularity: this is the case only for a quarter of individual belief-stories. Only 37% of the secular respondents do not care if there is a God.

Deinstitutionalisation leads to destabilisation, and therefore scepticism. If we want to define one of the types as modern, then it is the sceptical one. To be modern is to be sceptical. Alternatively, in a positive sense, to be modern means being a seeker.

Danièle Hervieu-Léger coined the term *pèlerins*, pilgrims, for these seekers.⁴ In this sense, spirituality is “in” – it is a megatrend of our times. But this spirituality is a highly privatised spirituality without belonging to a church; sometimes, this takes the shape of short-term communities with rituals and gurus.

TABLE 2: Shift in the last forty years

| | secular | sceptical | religious | churchly |
|------|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| 1970 | 9% | 32% | 36% | 23% |
| 1980 | 21% | 32% | 34% | 13% |
| 1990 | 23% | 39% | 27% | 11% |
| 2000 | 26% | 39% | 27% | 8% |
| 2010 | 26% | 45% | 24% | 5% |

Data Base: Surveys 1970–2010

This is an important aspect of the development of the religious dimension of modern cultures: Mobility characterises modern religiosity/spirituality. In religious terms, we can say that it is a time for conversions. People change their religious orientation more often during their lifetime than in previous times. Some leave the Church; later on, some join again. Others approach Buddhism or Islam, or they look around for spiritual rituals, like healing services or esoteric wisdom.

Summarizing, we see that the transformation of the ideological landscape of Austria continues mutely. What can churches do in this situation? For me, it is necessary to conduct an open dialogue with *all* types. It would be a fatal tendency “to only convert those, who are already converted.” This is a quotation of a statement of Heinrich Swoboda from his book “Großstadtseelsorge” (Metropolis-pastoral) from 1911! Karl Rahner taught, that even priests in their homilies should preach as if the audience were atheists. It is a mega-challenge to evangelise in an “atheistic mode”. In addition, in modern societies, tolerance will become a more necessary virtue. Otherwise, ideological tensions and battles could arise.

In addition, the cultural privatisation of religion is over. Religion is back on the political stage.

Muslims in Austria

In the next part of my lecture we will look at the religious situation of Muslims, who came from Islamic cultures to Austria and live now in our modern pluralistic culture. My main thesis is that Muslims are suffering from heavy modernisationstress.

A part of my reflections about Islam in Austria will be the reaction of Austrians to the incoming Muslims.

9. Muslims who come to Austria as migrants are under modernisationstress. Our data from 2010 show that from generation to generation their Islamic belief-system is changing quickly.

⁴ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion en mouvement, le pèlerin et le converti* (Paris: Editions Flammarion, 1999).

The Islamic community in many countries of Europe – in Austria too – is increasing rapidly. Therefore, in the last survey in 2010 about “Religion in the Life of Austrians,” we implemented a special sample for first, second, or third generation Muslims living in Austria. Their roots are in the premodern cultures of Anatolia, the Balkans or Africa. We wanted to know how they live and what they believe. Another important question was if the lifestyle and belief-systems of Muslims changed from the first to the following generations. Of great interest was a look at the gender roles of male and female Muslims in the different generations. In addition, we analysed the relation between the local Austrian population and the migrant Muslims.

Here are some highlights of my research, which help us to understand some aspects of the recent politics in relation to religion in Austria and Europe in recent years.

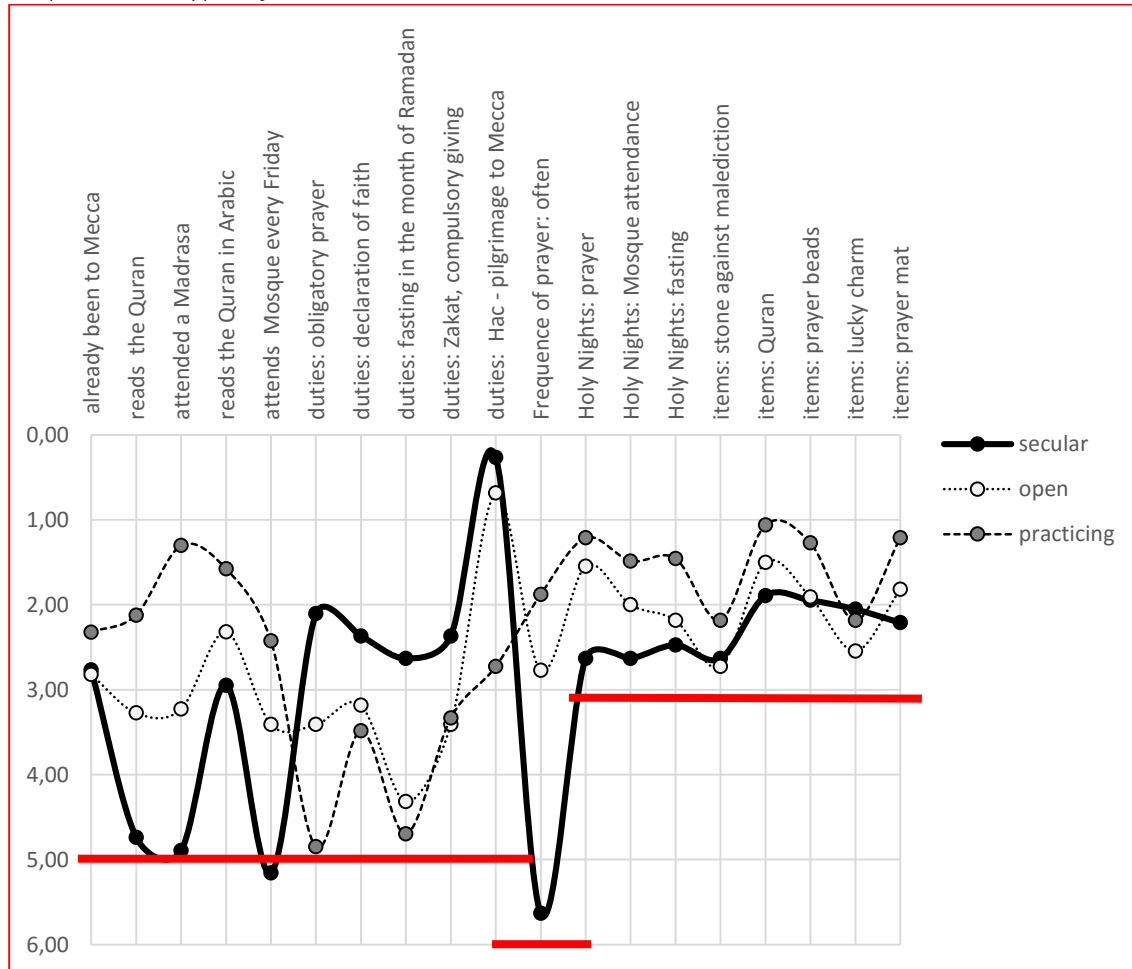
Types of Islamic religion in Austria

The commitment of Muslims to their religious community differs greatly. To form again a typology, we took the following groups of items:

- about belief: the five pillars of Islam – declaration of faith, obligatory prayer, fasting in the month of Ramadan, compulsory giving, pilgrimage to Mecca;
- about practice: services in the Holy Nights, going to the Mosque on Fridays, and
- about the possession of holy things: the holy book of Quran, holy stone, prayer mat, lucky charm.

Based on these items, we identified three types of Muslims who are living in Austria: the practising (48%), the open (27%) and the secular ones (25%).

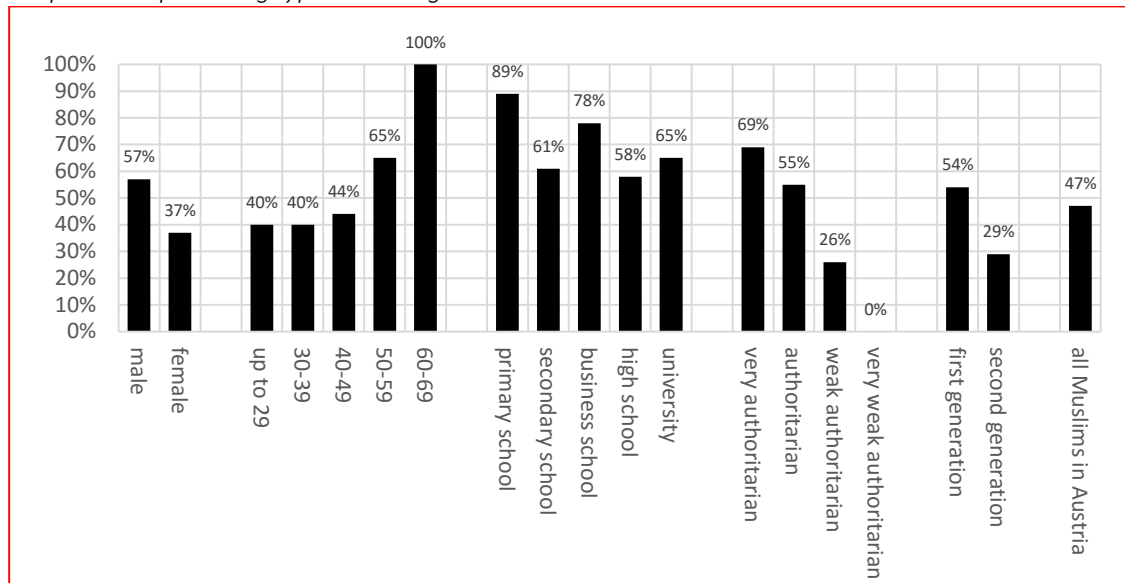
Graph 1: Three types of Muslims



The scale for duties goes from 0=no to 5=yes, for prayer frequency between 1 and 6, for possessions between 1 and 3, for others between 1 and 5. 2010

The distribution of these three types in the various social strata is different: more men than women practise, the higher the level of school education generally the lower the percentage, and from the first to the second generation the percentage practising is halved. Therefore, the older the Muslims are, the more they belong to the practising type.

Graph 2: The practising type according to social items



Source: Religion in the life of Austrians 2010

Authoritarianism has a major impact. Authoritarianism is a personality characteristic: authoritarian persons are submissive. They feel that those who are above them in the hierarchy are right. They do not build their own stable identity, but they borrow it from strong leaders or structured groups. There are many authoritarian persons in premodern cultures, such as in Anatolia, where many of the Muslims in Austria come from.

The religiosity, which they bring with them as migrants from their homeland to Austria, is characterised by an authoritarian style. The correlation between the Islamic belief system and authoritarianism is very strong. This is the case with the first generation. When Muslims live Austria's modern culture for a greater amount of time, authoritarianism decreases quickly. On average of all Muslims the percentage of those who are religious and authoritarian together falls from 61% in the first generation to 39% in the second generation.

Table 3: Religiosity and authoritarianism of Muslims in the first and the second generation

| | | religious + authoritarian | religious + non-authoritarian |
|-------|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| men | 1. generation | 78% | 6% |
| | 2. generation | 58% | 11% |
| | <i>all men</i> | <i>74%</i> | <i>7%</i> |
| women | 1. generation | 40% | 25% |
| | 2. generation | 26% | 54% |
| | <i>all women</i> | <i>35%</i> | <i>34%</i> |

Source: „Religion in the life of the Austrians“ – Muslims, 2010

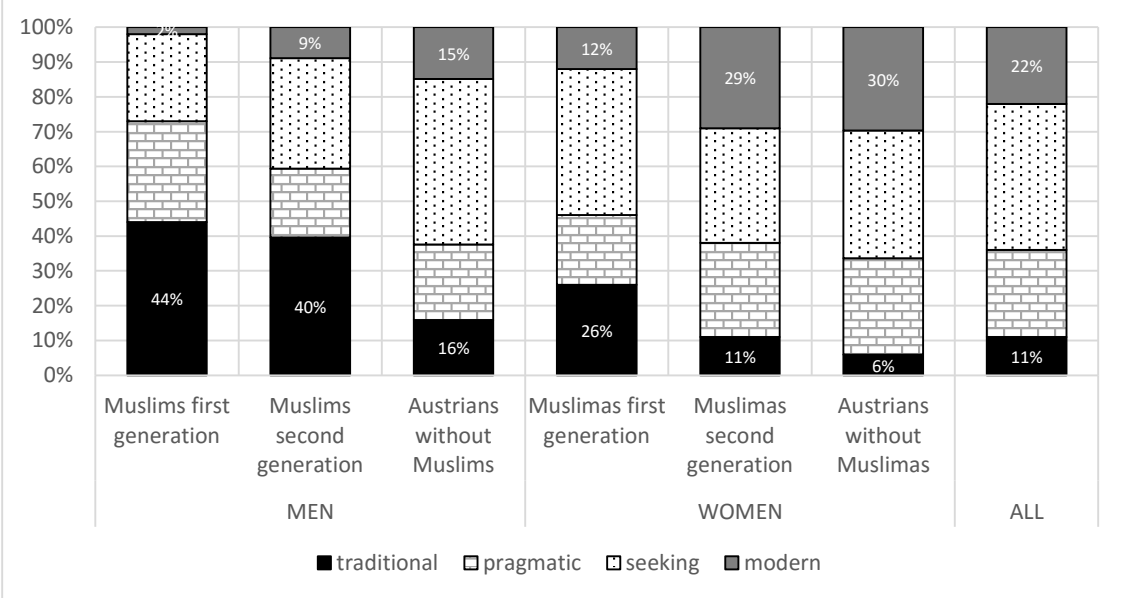
The modern culture of Austria is gradually changing the inner structure of Islamic religiosity. The Muslims who live in Austria are creating in their own life a modern version of Islam. It is a change within the Islamic religious culture from the bottom up, long before the religious leaders of the Islamic community modernise the official teaching. Are mainly the grassroots Muslims in Austria forming a “European Islam,”

which is compatible with the modern values of Europe such as religious freedom or gender roles?

10. This change in the Islamic belief-system is a part of an ongoing modernisation of their lives. At the same time, we observe for example a change in authoritarianism, of gender-roles and in the readiness to have children.

That seems to be the case and we can present good empirical arguments for it. We have data about the gender roles of Muslims in Austria, and this data again describe the different generations. Muslims of the first generation have a very traditional concept of the role of men and women (43%). On the contrary, Muslim women of the second generation overall tend more and more to a modern gender role, more so than their male counterparts do. Muslim women are the forerunners in this development. That is understandable, because women are the winners of modernisation of the lifestyle.

Graph 3: Gender roles according to sex and generation of migration



Source: Austrian Gender Survey 2012

“Cultural Christians”

In European countries, an anti-Islamic mood has emerged in recent years. Demonstrations against an Islamisation of Europe have been organized. The hub of that movement was Eastern Germany. The organisation is named PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident). Historically, for them Europe is a Christian continent. This should not be changed by the migration of Muslims from different Islamic regions of the world.

11. Among Austrians, very different attitudes towards Muslims are found. Three quarters of Austrians are “Cultural Christians”: They dream of a Christian Occident and wish to restore it. Approximately half of them are militant, the others peaceful. According to the militants, Islam and democratic Europe are incompatible. For them,

Islam has *per se* an inner affinity with violence. The peaceful Cultural-Christians argue that violent groups abuse Islam. The rest of the population – who do not belong to the Cultural Christians – seek religious dialogue between all religions.

In the 2010 study “Religion in the Life of Austrians,” we focused on this topic: How do Austrians perceive the growing Islamic population in Europe – and in Austria? For Austrians, how compatible is modern European culture with Quran-based Islamic values?

With a series of items, we could identify three types of relationship between Christianity and Islam. The first type opts for a peaceful and productive dialogue between both religions, their leaders and their members in the local communities (31%). Then there are the so-called “Cultural Christians” (“Kulturchristen”). They are convinced that “a self-confident Christianity is important for Europe”. On average 56% of Austrians agree with this. Within the “Cultural Christians”, there are two subtypes. The one is peaceful (40%), the other militant (29%).

Table 4: Three types in respect of the relationship between Islam and Christianity in Europe

| | militant Cultural Christians | pro religious dialogue | peaceful Cultural Christians | all |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-----|
| Islam is <i>per se</i> a peaceful religion but extremists abuse it for their own aims. | 72% | 78% | 82% | 78% |
| The moral values of Islam are traditional and old-fashioned. They are not suitable in the Europe of the 21 st century. | 86% | 62% | 69% | 74% |
| Islam is, as Christianity and Judaism, a world religion. As such it stands for peaceful cohabitation. | 53% | 57% | 61% | 57% |
| A self-confident Christianity is important for Europe. | 81% | 0% | 82% | 56% |
| At the same time, one can be a Muslim and a good democrat. | 29% | 41% | 81% | 50% |
| Islam is a violent religion, which favours the emergence of radicalised groups and terrorism. | 66% | 38% | 33% | 46% |
| Christian Churches should take a harsher stand against Islam. | 79% | 7% | 0% | 32% |

Source: „Religion in the life of the Austrians“ – Muslims, 2010

The Christian Churches and the refugees

Finally let me make some remarks about the challenge presented the Christian Churches by the refugees who have come since 2015 to Europe, and more will come in the next years as well.

I can identify the following main tasks for the Churches and for those who teach religion in our schools:

1. I'll start with results of a survey which I conducted in 2015. Our populations express very different emotions. Some people feel confidence, others worry, some are angry. Which emotion is dominant in a single person is decided within this person themselves. It depends on the degree of anger.

2. The faces of anger today are manifold: Since the financial crisis of 2008 many fear of a drop in social status. Many are anxious of not achieving enough happiness in their short lifespans of 90 years. They fear being left behind. The more anxious a person is the more he or she tends to anger.

3. People who are angry because of their anxiety and fear have a pessimistic worldview. They want to keep refugees away from their country. Some of them are full of hatred and violence towards refugees and attack their homes.

4. In the years ahead our countries need a lot of people who are confident and therefore prone to help. They are the optimistic group in our population. Their dominant emotion is not anxiety, but confidence.

5. The main task for Churches is not to moralize against the defenders, but to try to heal their anxiety. It is necessary for the Church to be therapeutic, not be judgemental.

6. For healing the *angst* in our population there a policy of confidence should be formed. The Churches could encourage the responsible leaders not to make a defensive policy of fear, but an offensive policy of confidence. Such a policy of confidence does not work at the level of symptoms, but tries to reduce the causes of flight: which are war and hopelessness due to poverty.

7. Education contains some healing power. Churches have very good institutions for education. You as teachers in the schools work in one of them. Aims of education are: to strengthen the personality of the individual, to enable them to understand political development and to organise interreligious dialogue, above all between Islam and Christianity.

8. Celebrations and events have a powerful effect in healing. Whoever knows a refugee face-to-face, normally has less anxiety in comparison to someone who has no personal contact with refugees.

9. We have to mind our language. Images of avalanches, bulwarking and streams correlate with anger und defensiveness. Whoever is confident speaks about people with faces, knows names und stories, feels empathy and mercy. Pope Francis teaches tirelessly that God is mercy.

10. Therefore, the goal of teaching religion in schools is to form young peoples who are not dominated by anger and hate, but by mercy, confidence and engagement. Those peoples are a blessing for our countries, who are perhaps not perfect, but connected with this God of mercy.