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Emerging Spirituality in 21st Century Vienna
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Emerging Spirituality in 21st Century Vienna

Essay

Hundreds of thousands of commuters daily rush by. Steel and concrete, graffiti and litter, frame the scene-- modernity in all its sterile and not-so-sterile efficiency. This is the picture of the Vienna underground station Stephansplatz, situated in the heart of the city. Yet in a quiet corner of the U1 and U3 intersection lies the Virgilkapelle. Accidentally unearthed in 1973 by subway construction workers, this thirteenth century chapel stands as a taunt in the face of surrounding modernism. The irony shouldn't be missed. While residents and tourists rush by, Virgilkapelle isn't going anywhere. While it may have lain dormant for several centuries, this ancient relic would be awakened by modernism. So too, highly sophisticated, secular, modernist Vienna is beginning to experience a re-emergence and re-shaping of spirituality at the dawn of the 21st Century.

"God is dead" declared Nietzsche. Or at least the institutional church is dead, so many proclaimed in the latter part of the 20th Century. Yet a full-scale dismissal of the Roman Catholic Church in Vienna is premature, if not grossly naïve. Whether or not Vienna again becomes institutionally active within the Roman Catholic Church (a point we shall touch on later in the paper), that institution must be at least the starting point for any understanding of historic and contemporary Viennese spirituality.

I. Land der Dome: the homogeneous institutional religious heritage of pre-WW2 Vienna.

I.A. The deep and long-standing Roman Catholic heritage.

Vienna is filled to overflowing with Roman Catholic “furniture”, statues and crucifixes, artwork and towering church buildings. Even when seldom used in a religious sense, they stand as a testimony to the historic strength of the Church in Austria. It is no accident that the symbolic and geographic center of the city is the glorious Stephansdom, The Catholic calendar still gives shape to the Austrian way of life. Restricted hours of work on Sundays, church holidays such as Corpus Chrisi, Ascension Day, the Immaculate Conception of Mary, though seen by many simply as convenient breaks from work, are nonetheless a lingering reminder of Vienna’s Roman Catholic heritage.

As the seat of the Holy Roman Empire, Vienna served as the hub of the Counter-Reformation. (Bischof et al: *Religion in Austria*, p. 1) Staunch Roman Catholics, and fearful of losing their powerful dynastic grip, the Habsburgs unleashed their “re-catholicization” of a nation that in the early decades of the Protestant Reformation had seen some 80-90% of the population embrace the Protestant faith. Take a walk into the recently renovated Eighteenth-Century Karlskirche and ride the elevator to the platform under the cupola, and you can observe first-hand a mural of Martin Luther and his writings being cast into a fiery hell. Obviously, much has changed in church and society in the

years since the initial Reformation and Counter-Reformation, but the furniture still remains.

Although declining in membership at an alarming rate of up to 50,000 members per year (www.statistik.at), some 5.9 Million Austrians still officially declare themselves to be Roman Catholic. According to an church publication “Leistungen der Kirche in Worten und Zahlen”, 770,000 Roman Catholic pupils attend religious instruction in Austrian public schools twice per week, about 94% of all professing Roman Catholic children—plus many not officially affiliated with the Church. Austria knows nothing of American separation of church and state. Religious instruction is supplied to the state schools by paid religious workers, and the newspapers regularly contain columns by Vienna’s Cardinal Schönborn. Clearly we must acknowledge the deep historic Catholic roots in Viennese society.

I.B. The Protestant Churches--Evangelische Kirche A.B. u. H.B.

While the early decades of the 16th Century brought the Reformation throughout Austria, the bloody Counter-Reformation resulted in the vast majority of Austria’s Protestants being either killed or driven out of the country. Those remaining either “converted” back to Catholicism or went underground, with the exception of certain isolated villages. Two centuries later, as the Habsburg Empire expanded to include territories of various ethnicities and religious backgrounds, an Edict of Tolerance was signed in 1782 which granted Protestants some measures of religious freedom. However, it was not

until 1961 that the Evangelische Kirche A.B (Lutherans) and H.B. (Reformed) were granted official recognition by the Austrian government, surprisingly 6 years after the Mormon church gained such recognition. Today some 335,000 still claim membership in the Protestant Church, yet in the post-war era, accelerated since the 1970s, there has been a sharp decline in membership and Sunday attendance. (www.statistik.at)

I.C. Various Expressions of Eastern Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy has been a presence in Austria since the Habsburgs welcomed them as a bulwark against the invading Ottoman Empire in the 17th Century. Recent history following the fall of communism has greatly expanded the variety and ranks of Orthodoxy, so that today's Vienna boasts a greater expression of Orthodoxy's ethnic representations than any other city in the world. Termed the "Gateway to the Orthodox world", numerous nationalities find their home in Vienna, with a total of 93,294 members (179,472 throughout Austria) from all branches of Orthodoxy. (Zulehner/Polak: *Religion - Kirche - Spiritualität in Österreich nach 1945*, p.18)

I.D. Judaism

In one of the great tragedies of the 20th Century, the Jewish population in Austria (and certainly in many countries in Europe) was virtually extinguished through the Holocaust of the Second World War. Prior to the war, the Jewish community was one of the most flourishing

centers of Judaism in Europe, with some 180,000 Jews living in Austria in 1938, down to 6,000 at the war's end. Yet today's Jewish minority of 7,000 – 8,000 has become again a “very visible group among the different denominations.” (ibid. p.19)

The atrocities of the Holocaust are without parallel in 20th Century Austria in the systematic destruction of a religious faith through the slaughter of its members. The decades that followed the war have seen the decline of religion through greatly different means, as demographic, economic, and political forces have greatly eroded the grip of the institutional Roman Catholic Church and Protestant Churches.

II. Sea Change

II.A. Pan-European and Global Trends

The confluence of powerful forces, some Euro-specific and others global have contributed to the rapid reshuffling the ideological and spiritual landscape of Vienna from the latter part of the 20th Century until today. Mobility has seen an unprecedented global advance through the advent of multiple means of rapid transportation. Economic and industrial advances over the past two centuries have brought about the rise of a middle class, mass production, and more recently hyper-specialization, disposable income, never-ending options, and the consumerism and materialism that follows. Regional

political changes, most significantly the fall of communism to the East and the rapid integration of Europe through the European Union and other institutions, have been reframing national and regional identities bringing about further advances in economic integration and ease of immigration and social mobility. Vienna's geographic position as a gateway city, coupled with her historic alliances, accentuates these changes. Technological advances, especially in the information technologies, are reconstituting global realities and bringing a multitude of conflicting worldviews into offices and living rooms around the world. *Weltanschauungen* have morphed from modern rationalism to postmodern relativism to everywhere in between. Untangling these (and a host of other) highly intertwined web of influences, evaluating the causes and consequences of each, and furthermore determining to what degree each is or is not unique to Austria would be an significant under-taking, far outside the scope of this essay. What is more manageable, however, is acknowledging the rapidity and extent of change in the global city of Vienna, and as it relates to our topic, the rise of individualism and parallel fall of institutionalism.

II.B. Flight from the Institutional Church

With the exception of the brief period in the 16th Century between the launching of the Protestant Reformation and the onslaught of the Counter-Reformation, for the first time in well over a millennium, Vienna has fewer than 50% professing Roman Catholics.

(Austria-wide that number is now under 70%). Net membership losses across Austria of 20,000 per year in the 1970s have turned to some 40-50,000 per year in the 2000s. (www.statistik.at) As displayed in Table 1 below, the mainline Protestant Churches have also witnessed this trend of a substantial loss of membership, with those “Without religious affiliation” (*ohne religiöse Bekenntnis, o.r.B.*) rising dramatically. In fact, those who profess “o.r.B.” now make up the 2nd largest population in Austrian religiosity, behind Catholicism. Attendance levels in religious organizations have also plummeted, with a mere 13% of the Viennese population regularly attending a house of worship. (European Values Study, www.europeanvalues.nl)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Without religious affiliation</i>
1900	91.6	2.7	0.0	0.2
1971	87.4	6.0	0.3	4.3
1981	84.3	5.6	1.0	6.0
1991	78.0	5.0	2.0	8.6
2001	73.6	4.7	4.7	12.0

Source: www.statistik.at (The Statistical Yearbook of Austria)

The Department for Church Social Research in Austria (*Arbeitsstelle für kirchliche Sozialforschung*) periodically conducts research on the degree of authoritarianism in Austria. By “authoritarianism,” they mean a “willingness to accept outside control”, and not the normal pejorative sense of the word. What they found, as one can observe from Table 2 below, is that over the course of 30 years, a major shift occurred in the Austrian population with the way

they relate (or refuse to relate) to authorities, from a willingness of 79% in 1970 down to 47% in 2000.

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Austrian Index of "Authoritarianism"	79%	67%	51%	47%
<i>Source: Arbeitsstelle für kirchliche Sozialforschung</i>				

With over half the adult population admittedly "unwilling to accept outside control," it is no wonder that the concept of answering to a church authority is an ever-increasing challenge for Austrian religious institutions.

If the widespread disdain for authority and institutionalism were not enough already, scandal rocked the Roman Catholic Church in the mid-1990s with allegations of sexual misconduct on the part of Vienna's Cardinal Hans Wilhelm Groër. Again in 2004, Austrians were shocked to learn that some 40,000 images of child pornography, as well as sexual acts between priests and seminarians were uncovered at a seminary in Sankt Pölten. (New York Times, August 13, 2004) These egregious acts, together with mounting frustration over obligatory church tax (*Kirchensteuer*) for all members, has provided further motivation for many to break from institutional religion.

II.C. Secularism and Superficial Secularism

If we adopt Peter Berger's definition of secularism, "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the

domination of religious institutions and symbols”, (Berger, “The Process of Secularization”, from *Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, p. 107) then, as we have examined above, Vienna is indeed a highly secular society. Vienna mirrors a Europe-wide trend toward some degree of secularism, what Max Weber termed the “disenchantment of the world.” (Weber, *Science as a Vocation*)

As we look beyond traditional socio-demographic questions of church membership and attendance, and into the beliefs and practices of Viennese regardless of institutional affiliation, we shall see that Vienna is far too spiritually complex for the blanket label “secularism.” Jose Casanova speaks to this point when he says, “One should perhaps talk of the unchurched of the European population and of religious individualization, rather than of secularization.” (*Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration*. 2004.) Grace Davie has spoken of “believing without belonging” in post-WW2 Britain, a phenomenon shared by Austria. There are many who hold certain values or beliefs (such as a belief in God, the importance of loving one’s neighbor) and practices (such as frequent prayer) who have little or no affiliation to the institutional Church. Complicating things further are those “belonging without believing”, people who retain church membership nominally but have practically rejected the fundamental tenets of the faith. (Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*. 1994.)

While secularizing influences of modernity have undoubtedly had an impact on Viennese society, they have served to re-shape, not

to supplant spirituality entirely. Instead of the advocating classic secularization theory, more fitting concept would be the differentiation and privatization of religion. The radical decline of the institutional church should not necessarily imply the loss of private, even very deep-seated and personal beliefs. Philip Jenkins, in his 2007 book *God's Continent*, agrees with this assessment, "The recent experience of Christian Europe might suggest not that the continent is potentially a graveyard for religion but rather that it is a laboratory for new forms of faith, new structures of organization and interaction, that can accommodate to a dominant secular [public] environment." (p. 19)

Full of Wiener *Stolz*, Austrian satirist Karl Kraus once declared, "The streets of other cities are paved with asphalt, whereas the streets of Vienna are paved with culture." As we have shown, the streets of hyper-modern, publicly secular, Vienna are paved on top of a deep and longstanding tradition of religious culture, one that is again being unearthed and rebuilt, albeit often in unfamiliar forms.

II.D. Privatized Re-Sacralization: Consumerism and Religion Constructors

Former religious homogeneity has given way to heterogenous spirituality in Vienna. "Today Austria is tightly woven into a European megaculture... What Europe has in common as far as religion is concerned is the great diversity of types of *Weltanschauung*, not only

individual ones but also those of whole nation” (Zulehner, from *Religion in Austria*, p. 49).

This diversity in spiritual belief is not simply on a societal level. Concurrent with the decline of the institutional church has been the rise of individualization of spirituality, where individuals seek spirituality on their own terms. Capitalistic consumerism has infiltrated the realm of the divine. Adam Possami, in his work, *Religion and Popular Culture*, demonstrates how the rise and expansion of the capitalistic enterprise has greatly affected the psyches of modern societies and individuals. (Possami, chapter 2)

As the consumerist mentality migrates from the economic realm to the spiritual realm, it takes on varied expressions, from the attempts of religious institutions to appeal to the desires of their religious “consumers” (such as is common in American evangelical mega-churches) and in the production and consuming of New Age products. Austria has begun to see evidences of the former (which we will touch on in the section III.), and has abundant evidences of the latter phenomenon. Possami points to the appeal of New Age spirituality in postmodern societies as “hyper-consumer religions...consuming products for gaining and enhancing sensations.” (49) The number of esoteric bookstores and trinket shops has mushroomed in recent times, and eastern religious symbolism has gone mainstream, from the yin yang Rucksack pins for sale at office supply stores to the pale-skinned Austrian woman sitting in the lotus position advertising yoghurt. It is a common adage that “sex sells”. In

consumerist Austria, consumer-based spirituality sells. To be fair, however, Eastern religion is not simply a consumerist novelty in Austria. The number of convinced Buddhists and Hindus (or those genuinely sympathetic with Eastern religion) is on the rise. Sean Gill writes to this point, stating, “Whereas, almost exclusively up to the 1880s and with very few exceptions until after World War II, new religions in Europe had tended to be in some way related to the Judeo-Christian tradition, this is no longer necessarily or even probably the case” (Gill, *Religion in Europe*, p. 121).

Paul Zulehner uses the term “religion composers” to describe those who, whether remaining in official membership with a recognized church or not, pick and choose from the teachings of that church as well as from other traditions and philosophies, and compose their own spiritual world view. An example of such a person would be a University of Salzburg professor whom the author encountered in 1998, who declared himself to be “*Evangelisch*” (Protestant), while enthusiastically describing his relationship to his spiritual mentor, a Roman Catholic nun who specialized in Zen Buddhism. On a broader societal level, the World Values Survey claims that 83% of Austrians believe there is a God, while only 16% believe there is a hell and 37% in heaven. This is significant as we bear in mind that 70% of Austrians are self-professed Roman Catholics, and 88% are affiliated with one of Austria’s 14 officially recognized denominations. Perhaps even more striking is the question posed to Austrians, “Jesus’ resurrection brings meaning to my life.” Of the Roman Catholics surveyed, only 58%

agreed, and a mere 44% of Protestants answering in the affirmative. When asked about their understanding of life after death, Austrians answered:

TABLE 3: Austrian's views on life after death:

40% no hope
 29% uncertain
 15% reincarnation
 16% Christian understanding of resurrection
 of body and soul

Source: *Religion im Leben der ÖsterreicherInnen 2000*.

Interestingly, 32% of Austrians who have withdrawn their membership from religious institutions still hunger for religious rituals, along with a surprising 21% of those without any religious affiliation (Zulehner/Polak, *Religion — Kirche — Spiritualität in Österreich nach 1945*, p. 67).

Thomas Luckmann makes an optimistic assessment of such “religion composers” and of the general individualization of spirituality in his lecture, *Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?* His functional view of transcendences acknowledges the decline of “great” transcendences of traditional religious orientations, but the expansion of “intermediate” and “little” transcendences of the individual in everyday life, what he calls the “sacralization of subjectivity”. Rather than a loss of faith, he sees a personalization of faith in areas that formerly were little known, such as astrological advice columns,

pocketbooks on popular psychology, Eastern “mystical” literature, positive thinking treatises, and so on. While a point could justifiably be made that the burgeoning field of neo-spiritual products provides evidence exposing the flaws of classic secularization theory, it would seem that Luckmann overenthusiastically gives spiritual quantity preferential treatment over quality.

While the sea-change away from institutional religion toward individualistic, personalized, “religion construction” and “hyper-consumer” spirituality stands in the face of classic secularization theory, substantive de-secularization may not be the best explanation either. Perhaps we are facing an increasingly complex hybrid of pluralistic, semi-secular spirituality, of people with a vicarious appreciation for certain roles of the institutional church, who subjectively jettison doctrines and practices essential to historic Christianity while others are conveniently retained, and still others are imported from an eclectic, even contradictory, variety of sources such as eastern mysticism, neo-paganism, and the occult, all while championing tolerance and considering sincerity the litmus test for spiritual value.

The former homogeneity of Austria’s religious heritage has been overrun by individualistic spiritual syncretism since the end of the Second World War. But a third wave has come and is coming to Vienna, the rise of deeply held belief systems, to which we shall now turn our attention.

III. Rise of deeply held religious belief systems

III.A. Islam on the rise

Unique to Europe north of the Balkans, Austria has a long history of peaceful co-existence with Islam. Since the fighting and defeating the Ottoman Turks in 1529 and again in 1683, Austria has made amends with her former enemies. In 1912, Austria enacted a law specifically granting Muslims a freedom to practice their religion, almost 50 years prior to the two mainline Protestant churches (A.B. and H.B.) “Austria is often cited as a model for the state’s contact with Islam” (*Religion in Austria*, 151).

In the ruins of WW2, the following decades demanded many workers to rebuild Vienna and fill gaping holes of a lack of blue-collar workers. Whereas historic ties to other central European countries such as Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia would have been natural sources for such laborers, the Iron Curtain sealed off that generation as an untappable resource. With no colonies to look to (such as France to Algeria or Great Britain to South Asia), Austria and Germany recruited workers largely from her former Ottoman enemy, Turkey.

Throughout the 1990s, as communism collapsed and Yugoslavia entered into a brutal civil war, thousands of political asylum seekers fled to Austria from Bosnia Herzegovina. The presence of Bosnian, Albanian, and Kosovar Muslims in Vienna is of interesting note, due to

the fact that these are Muslims who have for centuries developed and embodied a European Islam.

Though still numerically a small minority of the Austrian population (less than 5% throughout Austria, 7.8% in Vienna), their growth rate has been impressive, as displayed in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4: The growth of Islam in Vienna and in Austria

<i>Year</i>	<i>Muslims in Austria</i>	<i>Muslims in Vienna</i>
1971	22,267	5,889
1981	76,939	28,099
1991	158,776	62,305
2001	338,998	121,149

Source: Statistisches Jahrbuch Österreich, 2001

University of Vienna Muslim scholar, Mouhanad Khorchide, maintains that this seeming exponential growth is overstated in part due to the fact that many Muslims did not declare their religious affiliation until the 1990s or later.

The question of Muslim integration in Vienna (and throughout Europe) is a constant topic in the media, academia, and in society, with no shortage of strongly held opinions on all sides. Egyptian-born Jewish writer Bat Ye'or's alarmist position envisions of a complete takeover of Europe by Islam. Ye'or writes of the emergence of "Eurabia", a "Muslim-dominated subcontinent, in which the remaining Christians and Jews might enjoy some tenuous kind of second-class status, of dhimmitude" (Jenkins, *God's Continent*, p.4). Others posit a peaceful integration, the development of a modernistic Euro-Islam

with pluralistic, at times secular, values leading to an enrichment of the current cultural and spiritual landscape of Europe.

The issues surrounding integration are complex and multi-sided. Fears of losing one's cultural and spiritual heritage are concerns of both Muslims and non-Muslims in Austria. The cultural and religious divides make integration much more difficult for a head-covered Egyptian immigrant woman than for a Polish Catholic looking to establish a new life in Vienna.

Stanislaw Korzeniowski's highly interesting research into the encounter with Islam in Vienna (*Die Begegnung mit dem Islam in Wien*) is based on a study of the integration process between Muslims from the Anadolu Mosque on Pernerstorfergasse and Catholics from the Königin des Friedens Parish in Vienna's 10th District. Though not a quantitatively comprehensive study, it does provide fascinating qualitative insight into the beliefs, opinions, and practices of a segment of Austrian society. In Table 5 below, we observe apparently contradictory statements, where over 70% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, "I feel like an Austrian", yet only 25% agree or strongly agree to "In Austria I feel like a foreigner". The vast majority prefers Turkish cuisine (73%) to standard Austrian fare (9%), and a mere 13% believe their life would be better in Turkey.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
I feel like an Austrian	2.8	7.5	11.3	7.5	18.9	51.9
In Austria I feel like a foreigner	11.2	14.0	19.6	12.1	25.2	17.8
Turkish food tastes better to me than Austrian food	62.0	11.1	13.0	4.6	4.6	4.6
If I were to move back to Turkey, my life would be better there	1.9	11.2	9.3	11.2	24.3	42.1

1 – strongly agree, 6 – strongly disagree

Source: Korzeniowski, *Die Begegnung mit dem Islam in Wien*, p. 49.

Such is the complex nature of attempted integration without wholesale assimilation, of the Muslim community's journey to maintain and/or redefine their proper identity in Viennese society. Though still a relatively small minority in Vienna and throughout Austria, their relative strength of conviction, together with high birth-rates and increases in immigration, mean that Vienna will have to envision a future with a much greater and more significant interaction with Islam.

Jenkins makes an insightful point about this future interaction:

“For two centuries, many of the intellectual debates within European Christianity have been shaped by the encounter with secularism and skepticism, as Christians attempted to make their faith credible and relevant in the face of modernity. But what happens when the main interlocutors in religious debate operate from assumptions quite different from those of secular critics, when the rivals assume as a given the existence and

power of a personal God who intervenes directly in human affairs, and seek rather to clarify the nature of His revelation?”

(*God's Continent*, p. 265)

III.B. *Non-recognized emerging Christian movements*

Though the Roman Catholic Church (and on a much lesser scale, the *Evangelische Kirche A.B./H.B.*) statistically dominate Austria's institutional religious landscape, they are not the sole representatives in Austrian Christendom. Independent evangelical congregations (*Evangelikalen*), Pentecostals & Charismatics (*Pfingstgemeinden*), and the Evangelical Reformed Church, Westminster Confession (*Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche W.B.*) dot the spiritual landscape of Austria, albeit sparsely. For many, believing and belonging are synonymous, with high participation in the life of their congregations. Numbers are hard to come by, due to their decentralization and the fact that none of these congregations or denominations has been granted official recognition (*Anerkennung*) by the Austrian government, but estimates range from 20,000 – 30,000 adherents (Johnstone, *Gebet für die Welt*). Though statistically diminutive (some 0.3% of the Austrian population), their depth of conviction, evangelistic zeal, and (in certain congregations) rapid growth rate make them a topic for future research and discussion.

IIIC. *“New” deeply held religious movements*

While hardly “new”, when one speaks of a culture with 1,500 years of Catholic heritage, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are a

relatively recent import. Some 4,400 Mormons call Austria home (ibid.) and have enjoyed the status of official recognition since 1955. The Jehovah's Witnesses, numbering 37,039 (ibid.), while significantly larger than Mormonism, are not recognized by the Austrian state. These religious groups, together with newcomer Scientology, while doctrinally far removed from the non-recognized Christian movements highlighted in III.C., have the marks of strong convictions and proselytizing practices that warrant their inclusion into the discussion of the future of Viennese spirituality.

D. Signs of Comeback of the Institutional Church?

"Comeback des Jahres: Gott" (Comeback of the Year, God). So read the headline of the cover story of the *Österreich* newspaper on Christmas, 2007. The grounds for such an assessment are not without merit. Pope Benedict's visit to Vienna brought sizable, fervent crowds to Stephansdom and Am Hof waving "*Viva Papa!*" flags and banners, thousands even making pilgrimages to Mariazell, to the surprise of many who had deemed the current pope too dogmatic or simply irrelevant. The *Jugendkirche* (youth church) in St. Florian parish in Vienna's fifth district draws hundreds of young people to their Sunday evening masses with their own unique brand of emerging ancient-postmodern Catholicism. Additionally, *Movimenti*, various Catholic movements (such as Focolare, Neocatechumenate Way, Cursillo, and charismatic Catholic groups) are on the increase worldwide. "In Austria, they have gained much ground in the last few

years and are especially supported in Vienna by Cardinal Schönborn.” (Krätzl/Polak, in *Religion in Austria*, p. 94) Near Vienna one can now even find an international seminary of the Neocatachumenate.

While we have already noted how immigration has greatly contributed to the growth of Islam, a less reported fact is that immigrants of other traditional Christian backgrounds are also streaming into Austria. As post-communist Europe expanded her borders from the Iberian Peninsula to the Ural Mountains, Vienna’s immigrant pool has more and more originated from Central and Eastern Europe, resulting in an exponential increase in the numbers of Orthodox adherents, as well as a sizable Catholic immigrant population, as displayed in Table 7.

TABLE 6: Austrian and Immigrant Populations by Religious Affiliation in Vienna, 2001			
	<i>Austrians</i>	<i>Non-Austrians</i>	<i>Total</i>
Catholic	719,546	42,543	762,089
Orthodox	27,959	65,335	93,294
Muslim	51,483	69,666	121,149

Source: www.statistik.at

Viennese trend researcher Matthias Horx points to a “megatrend of respiritualization in European urban centers” (Vienna included) since the mid-1990s, a trend not shared by the Austrian countryside. A brief glance at the numbers in Table 7 below shows a definite upswing across the board on questions of religiosity:

TABLE 7: Signs of Religious Resurgence in Vienna

	<i>Vienna</i>		<i>Austrian Countryside</i>	
	1990	1999	1990	1999
Declare oneself religious	62%	64%	92%	88%
Belief in God	71%	79%	96%	91%
Belief in personal God	19%	24%	39%	40%
Strong importance of God in life	27%	35%	55%	59%
Sunday worship attendance	12%	13%	59%	37%

Source: European Values Studies 1990-1999

Regina Polak shares this assessment in her works, *Religion kehrt wieder* and *Megatrend Religion? Neue Religiositäten in Europa*. In her interview with Catholic Bishop Helmut Krätzl, she poses the question: “Despite all the difficulties, are you nevertheless convinced that the Church has a future?”

Bishop Krätzl responds:

Yes...Right now because of the priest shortage—which is very unfortunate—we’re seeing that the communities that no longer have a resident priest are developing a self reliance, which in the past would never have been expected, or even possible...In Vienna alone, there are hundreds of young people taking an entire year to prepare fourteen year-olds for confirmation...The number of people attending church has dropped, but the engagement of those who do attend has become much higher! A further thing: interest in theology has grown enormously. You see this in the enrollment at theology departments. I remember in my time there were 200 students registered in the theology department, of which 180 became priests. Today, there are 1000, at least half of whom are women...Theology professors also enjoy a good reputation in the public sphere and are brought into policy debates...
(*Religion in Austria*, pp. 94,95)

Others are not so convinced. Roman Catholic Priest, sociologist, and theologian Adolf Holl maintains, “The Church today is a foreign body in society, or else a museum attraction for tourists...About the so-called ‘re-spiritualization’... I tie that more or less to a newly awakened interest in esoteric spirituality.” (ibid, p. 84)

The issue of de-secularization/re-sacralization, in particular in regard to the future of institutional Christianity, is so complex that over-simplified positive or negative assessments do not suffice. We have attempted to show some patterns throughout this essay, however, that are worth restating. Powerful global and regional forces have shaken Vienna, leading to a substantial outward retreat from church membership and attendance, with some abandoning faith altogether, while others engage in individualized, self-constructed, syncretized spirituality. The vicarious role of the traditional church in society is still widely appreciated. Many continue to feel the need to practice life-stage rituals (baptism, weddings, and funerals) with the blessing of the church, and place some value on religious education for school children. Immigration, as noted above, is bringing some numbers back into the churches. Finally, a small but enthusiastic core of younger adherents could yet spell a positive future for the church in its varied forms.

IV. Significant questions for Vienna’s spiritual future

In this essay, we have examined the relatively homogeneous religious institutional heritage of Austria prior to World War 2, the sea

change away from the Church and toward more individualized form of spirituality, and the rise of various deeply held belief systems. The question before us is, "What next?" While leaving prognostications to those better informed, we shall conclude this essay with a series of questions to stimulate further thought and discussion:

1. How will the privatization and personalization of faith to shape the future of the institutional church(es), (especially the Roman Catholic Church)? How will the continued presence of the institutional Church shape the future of personal and private individual faith? What are the emerging movements within the institutional churches? What is unique about their approach? What effect will they have on the broader Church?

2. What will become of the ever-increasing non-traditional, non-attending, pluralistic, individual/private "religious constructors"? Can belief of this type be sustained in the absence of a connection to or only with vicarious connection to public institutional religion? What will the spiritual children and grandchildren of such "religious constructors" look like? What new communities and (dare we say) "institutions" will arise from this present revolt toward institutionalism?

3. What does the current trend toward Eastern religion, esoteric beliefs and practices, mean for the future of Austrian spiritual thought life and practice? (see also q.2) for religious constructors who continue to hold on to vestiges of Christian beliefs?

4. How will the rise of Islam (through new births, immigration, and conversion) impact the future Austrian beliefs, practices,

and society as a whole? Will Turkey be granted European Union membership, and if so, how will that affect Turkish migration to Austria? To what degree has/can/will Islam be influenced by and integrate into an urban, global, semi-secular, pluralistic society? With the growth of Islam, should we expect a looming clash of civilizations, a peaceful emergence of a modernistic Euro-Islam with a peaceful enrichment of the current cultural/spiritual landscape, or a third alternative?

5. What role will non-recognized emerging Christian movements, such as Free-Evangelicals and Pentecostals, begin to play as they increase in numbers? Can these relatively new and decentralized mini-institutions begin to fill the vacuum left by traditional Christian institutions? To what degree? And with what effects?

6. Similar to Q.5, what roles will non-Christian movements such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology play?

7. What role will neo-paganism and the occult play?

8. What new communities and movements will arise? With what effects?

9. How will immigration from Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Muslim world continue to re-shape the spiritual landscape of Vienna?

10. What continuing role will secularism play as it intersects with all of the institutions, practices, and movements in the above-mentioned 9 questions?

11. What unforeseen external forces in politics, technology, business, academia, natural disasters, wars, etc. will affect the future of Viennese spirituality? In what ways?

“For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

Haggai 2:6,7 ESV

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