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# **The relationship between religious world views, social attitudes and political preferences**

*Franz Höllinger, University of  
Graz, Austria*

## **Introduction**

Most social scientists, who have studied the social functions of religion, consider religion as a conservative element of society. According to them, the predominant function of religion in the course of history has been to maintain the established social order and value system. In fact, an endless number of empirical studies have confirmed that religious persons are more likely than others to adopt political, social and moral views and values, which are considered as "conservative" in a given society.

However, maintaining the established social values is not the only social function of religion. According to Ernst Troeltsch, there exist three ideal types of religion, each of them having a different relationship with the social system. The "church"-type of religion is characterised by relatively low religious and moral exigencies, and a concern for legitimising the established social values and social order. "Sects" impose high moral standards on their members, and many times propagate social ideals - such as the rejection of military violence, or the abolition of private property - which are in conflict with the established social value system. "Mysticism", the third ideal-type of religion, emphasises the self-realisation of the individual, thereby taking an attitude of indifference towards the social order, and supporting tolerance for everybody to choose his/her own way of life (Troeltsch 1912). Erich Fromm distinguishes two types of religion, authoritarian and humanitarian religion: in the centre of authoritarian religion there is an omnipotent God, who demands veneration and obedience from his followers. For humanitarian religion, God is a symbol for the human potential, and the principal virtue of this kind of religion is to realise one's own potentials. While feelings of guilt constitute the basic mood of authoritarian religion, the basic mood of humanitarian religion is joy (Fromm 1966). In a similar way, Ekkehard Bahr (1975) argues that there exist two kinds of religion which meet complementary human needs: The first kind of religion is concerned with social integration, fulfilling the human need for security, stability and social order. The second kind of religion aims at the emancipation of the individual from social constraints, meeting the human need for freedom and social justice. Rodney Stark and Williams S. Bainbridge have used similar concepts in their book „The future of religion. Secularisation, Revival and Cult Formation“ (1985). According to them, throughout the course of history, religion has shifted between adaptation to the social status quo, characteristic for the church-type of religion, and religious and social innovation, brought forward by religious sects and cult-movements.

Of course, the ideal-typical characteristics of church-religiosity do not apply to all church-members. Within the large European state-churches there exist also fundamentalist conservative movements, as well as more liberal groups with an affinity to leftist political ideologies (Gabriel 1987). A similar diversity of moral and social attitudes can be found among the followers of new religious communities and persons who are attracted to the esoteric and spiritual methods which are being propagated and diffused by the New Age movement. Generally, small religious communities impose high religious and moral standards on their members and thus are closer to the type of sectarian religion, while the esoteric and spiritual groups have a stronger tendency towards mysticism and its liberal social and moral attitudes. Accordingly, social scientists who focus on the sectarian aspect of the new religious and esoteric movement, assert that there exists a tendency towards authoritarianism and politically right-wing positions in such groups (Gugenberger/Schweidlenka 1992; Gross 1996). Other social scientists have pointed out that the concern for the development of the individual personality and for spiritual growth goes hand in hand with narcissist tendencies and little interest in social and political matters (Lüdtke 1989, List 1988). Finally, a third group of writers stresses that the New Age movement overlaps and interacts with counter-cultural movements such as the „green“, ecologist movement, the peace movement and feminism movement (Bellah 1976; Berger/Berger/Kellner 1973, 173 ff., Mörtz 1989, 35 ff.; Barker 1993; Bochsinger 1994, 185ff.; Hanegraaff 1996, 514 ff.). According to this view, New

Age is a counter-cultural movement, which is concerned with religious and political innovation at the same time. In my conference-paper, I want to show that church-related religiousness and the affinity towards the esoteric and spiritual methods of the New Age movement in fact constitute different types of religious world views, related to different social and moral value-systems, as indicated by Fromm's distinction between „authoritarian“ and „humanitarian“ religion, Bahr's dichotomy of the „integrative“ and the „emancipatory“ function of religion, and Stark and Bainbridge's concept of „church“ versus „cult-movements“. I will use the International Social Survey Programme 1998 on Religion, selecting five Central and Northwest European countries: Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland for my analysis. The text is divided into two parts. In the first part I will present descriptive results about religious practice, religious and esoteric beliefs, and about social and political attitudes in these countries. In the second part, I will analyse the relationship between religious world views and social attitudes and political preference.

### 1. Description of the indicators used for the analysis

**Table 1: Religiousness and Esoteric Beliefs**

		AUSTRIA	FRANCE	WEST-GERMANY	NETHERLANDS	SWITZERLAND
n=		1002	1133	1000	2020	1204
<b>RELIGIOUS PRACTICE (%)</b>						
Attending service	weekly	19	8	8	14	
	Less frequently	39	30	40	26	n.a. <sup>2</sup>
	(almost) never <sup>1</sup>	42	61	51	60	
Praying	daily	23	15	16	24	24
	Less frequently	56	41	54	33	60
	(almost) never <sup>1</sup>	20	44	30	42	16
<b>RELIGIOUS BELIEFS</b>						
% of respondents belief in...						
God <sup>3</sup>		51	38	41	44	44
Heaven		38	28	40	40	42
Hell		26	17	31	21	24
Religious miracles		59	32	56	33	51
<b>ESOTERIC BELIEFS<sup>4</sup></b>						
% of respondents belief in...						
Good luck charms		33	23	43	19	35
Fortune tellers		27	37	31	25	35
Faith healers		43	35	40	25	42
Astrology		32	38	41	21	42

**Notes:**

1. (almost) never = less than once a year + never.

2. Due to an error in data-coding, data for church attendance in Switzerland are not available.
3. Belief in God was calculated from the answer categories to the question "Which of the following comes closest to your opinion?" "I know that God really exists" + "Although I have doubts sometimes, I think that I believe in God".
4. The items were formulated in the following way: a) Good luck charms sometimes do bring good luck; b) Some fortune-tellers really can foresee the future; c) Some faith-healers do have God-given healing powers; d) A person's star sign at birth, or horoscope, can affect the course of their future.

**Table 1** summarises the results for religious practice, religious beliefs and belief in occult phenomena and esoteric practice in the five countries selected for the present analysis. We can observe that the rates of religious practice are similar in all these countries. The percentage of persons who attend church regularly varies between 8 percent in Germany and France, and 19 percent in Austria. A somewhat higher percentage, between 15 percent and 25 percent in the single countries reports to pray daily. Between 40 and 60 percent of the population of these countries never attend religious services (with the exception of specific social occasions such as weddings or funerals). The decrease of religious participation goes hand in hand with a decrease of traditional religious beliefs: Less than half of the respondents in the single countries belief in heaven, and only about one fourth believes in hell.

The ISSP-questionnaire also included four items about occult phenomena and esoteric practices. Between 20 and 45 percent of the respondents in the single countries believe in „good luck charms“, „fortune tellers“, „faith healers“ and „astrology“. The rate of persons who believe in such phenomena is more or less the same in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and France, and somewhat lower in the Netherlands.

There are no doubts, that church attendance and prayer, and the belief in God, heaven, hell and religious miracles are good indicators for church-type religiousness. It is not so clear, however, which dimension is being measured by the four items concerning belief in occult and esoteric phenomena. Good-luck charms belong to the repertoire of traditional popular magic. Practices such as astrology, fortune-telling and faith-healing have been in use since a long time as traditional healing and counselling methods. In the last decades, these methods have been rediscovered and diffused by the literature and the cult-groups of the New Age-movement. Thus, persons who believe in such practices may continue traditional popular magical beliefs, or they may be influenced by the ideology of New Age. Two findings support the assumption, that the belief in astrology, fortune-telling etc. tends to go together with an affinity towards New Age: If the belief in astrology, faith-healing and fortune telling were a relic of traditional popular esotericism, one should expect that such beliefs are more widespread among the older age cohorts; accordingly, if such beliefs were more widespread among the younger age cohorts, we might conclude that this increase is due to the contemporary dissemination by the New Age movement. The ISSP-data show that esoteric beliefs are more frequent among the younger generation, and thus support the second view. An additional argument can be provided from a recently carried out study on esoteric beliefs and New Age practices (see Höllinger 1999). According to this study, people who belief in esoteric and occult phenomena such as astrology and fortune-telling are more likely to practice New Age techniques such as meditation, Yoga, alternative medicine, esoteric methods such as astrology, Tarot-cards or I-Ging, and vice versa. As it is my intention, to compare the world views related to traditional (Christian) religiousness with the world views related to *modern* esotericism, I will use the four ISSP items as an (indirect) measurement for the affinity towards New Age-esotericism, being aware, that the measurement of this concept would require a more sophisticated and more complex empirical operationalization.

In Table 2 and Table 3 we will introduce the indicators on moral, social and political values, which will be used for the analyses in the next section of this paper. As we can see in **Table 2**, the attitudes towards premarital and extramarital sex, and cohabitation without marriage are rather similar in all 5 countries: Only a minority of 5 to 10 percent of the respondents in the single countries still maintain the ideal of premarital chastity. Cohabitation without marriage is accepted by the great majority of the population in all countries. Marital fidelity, however, is still an important value for two thirds or more of the population of the investigated countries. This finding shows, that certain moral ideals which the churches have disseminated for centuries, are kept alive even when the religious legitimations have lost their credibility. Homosexual relations are rejected by around 35-40 percent of Austrians, Germans and French, but only by 20 percent of the Dutch. The attitudes towards abortion depend

strongly on the motives for abortion. If there exists a medical indication, only a minority of 10 to 25 considers abortion as wrong. However a much larger percentage of the respondents does not consider social as a legitimate motive for abortion.

**Table 2: Sexual and Life Morality**

	AUSTRIA	FRANCE	GERMANY	NETHER- LANDS	SWITZER -LAND
n=	1002	1133	1000	2020	1204
<b>% of respondents are against...</b>					
Premarital sex	6	8	11	10	10
Cohabitation without marriage	18	10	13	11	14
Extramarital sex	66	63	65	82	72
Homosexuality	38	40	34	19	27
Abortion in the case of medical indication	21	8	24	13	23
Abortion in the case of social indication	50	22	50	50	39

Except for the items concerning sexuality, family and gender roles, the ISSP-questionnaire includes a very limited number of issues which were of interest for our analysis of the relationship between religion world views and social values: A set of questions about participation in political and social activities, two items concerning the attitudes towards modern technologies, two items about civil morality, and political party preference. Table 3 summarises the results for the questions which will be used for the following analyses:

a) *Voluntary social activities*: For our analysis we selected the items “participation in political groups/organisations” and “voluntary charitable activities”. The percentage of persons who participate in such activities is relatively low in all countries.

b) *Attitudes towards modern science*: One of the two ISSP-items is formulated in such a way (“we trust too much in science and not enough in our faith”) that a positive correlation with religiosity is evident. Therefore, only the more neutrally formulated item “modern science does more harm than good” was considered for our analysis. According to the answers, the attitudes towards modern science are overwhelmingly positive in all countries.

c) *Civil morality*: For our analysis we will use the item “Is it wrong in your opinion, if a taxpayer does not report all of his/her income to pay less taxes?”

d) *Political Party Preference*: this question will be described in detail in Table 6.

**Table 3: Social and Political Attitudes**

	AUSTRIA	FRANCE	GERMANY	NETHER- LANDS	SWITZER- LAND
n=	1002	1133	1000	2020	1204
% of respondents have participated in...					
Voluntary political activities	7	8	5	4	8
Voluntary charitable activities	8	30	10	30	20
% of respondents agree with the statement...					
Modern science does more harm than good	21	13	15	11	16
% of respondents feel it is not wrong ...					
if a taxpayer does not report all of his/her income to pay less taxes	49	40	44	38	33
if a person gives incorrect information to get government benefits	15	13	20	3	6

## **2. The associations between religious world views, and social and political attitudes**

### **2.1 Hypotheses**

As far as the relationship between church-related religiousness and moral and social values is concerned, we expect results similar to those that have been found already in previous studies (e.g. Zulehner/Denz 1993; Höllinger 1996):

Higher levels of religious beliefs and religious practice should be associated with

- more restrictive views about sexual and life morality;
- a preference for conservative political parties;
- higher rates of participation in charitable activities;
- rejection of behaviour which contradicts the ten commandments (such as cheating, lying);
- a tendency to reject modern science and technology.

About the moral, social and political preferences of persons who are close to the new esoteric movement there exist only few empirical data, and almost no cross-national comparative data.

Two surveys which have tried to investigate this issue more in detail, the survey "World view and personality" (Holm/Björkqvist 1996) and my own study on "Religion, Esotericism and Political Attitudes" (Höllinger 1999) are both based on samples of University students. The International Social Survey Programme on Religion permits for the first time, to investigate this question on the level of cross-nationally representative population survey data. Since ISSP includes only four items on "occult and esoteric beliefs", I will use additional data from an appendix to the Austrian questionnaire of the ISSP-98, which includes additional items about esoteric beliefs and participation in New Age activities.

According to the results of my previous research on this issue (Höllinger 1999), I expect that persons who believe in esoteric phenomena

- should have more liberal views about sexual and life-morality;

- should prefer ecologist “green” parties and left-liberal political parties;
- should participate more frequently than others in political protest activities;
- should tend to “anti-modernist” attitudes in regard to modern science and technology.

## 2.2 Empirical results from ISSP-1998

Analysing the association between religious world views and social and political attitudes, one has to take into account that religious and other social and political values are related to demographic and social-structural variables, and that these values may differ from country to country. Therefore we chose the method of multiple regression, including also age, sex, level of education and country into the model, in order to find out which is the net effect of religious variables (Switzerland was not included, because the variable “church attendance was not available for this country). The four religious variables in the model are: a) religious beliefs, measured by a scale consisting of: belief in God, heaven, hell and religious miracles; b) religious practice: church-attendance and prayer; c) religious denomination: Catholics, Lutherans, other Protestants, no denomination; d) esoteric beliefs: belief in good luck charms, faith healers, fortune-tellers, astrology.

**Table 4** presents multiple regressions for three items concerning sexual and life morality. The findings correspond to our expectations: Each of the three religious variables has a net effect on moral attitudes: persons with higher scores on religious belief, persons who attend church and who pray more frequently and persons who belong to a church or to a denomination have more restrictive views. On the other hand we find that persons believing in esoteric and occult phenomena have more liberal attitudes towards cohabitation, homosexuality and abortion than others. The effects are relatively small in size, but they are consistent across the three items which have been investigated.

**Table 4: Religious/Esoteric Beliefs and Moral Attitudes**

Multiple Regressions, Source: ISSP-98

	Living together without the intention of getting married (disagree/agree)	Sexual relations among adults of the same sex (wrong/not wrong)	Abortion in case of social indication (wrong/not wrong)
	<i>beta</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>beta</i>
Religious practice (low/high)	-,057	-,182	-,167
Religious beliefs (low/high)	-,194	-,149	-,159
Denomination (base: none)			
Catholic	-,022	-,014	-,117
Lutheran	-,034	-,023	-,078
Other Protestant	-,041	-,051	-,086
Esoteric beliefs (low/high)	,096	,059	,047
Age (young/old)	-,194	-,189	,037
Sex (male/female)	,022	,096	,029
Education (low/high)	,022	,149	,039
Country (base: France)			
Germany	,049	,062	-,239
Austria	-,002	,073	-,179
Netherlands	-,067	,350	-,318
R <sup>2</sup>	,272	,288	,187

**Table 5: Religious/Esoteric Beliefs and Social Attitudes**

## Multiple Regression

	Voluntary work in political organisations (no/yes)	Voluntary work in charitable organisations (no/yes)	A taxpayer does not report all of his income (not wrong/ wrong)	Modern science does more harm than good (agree/disagree)
	<i>beta</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>beta</i>
Religious practice (low/high)	,002	,138	,054	-,095
Religious beliefs (low/high)	,009	,020	,068	-,085
Denomination (base: none)				
Catholic	-,015	,042	-,052	,030
Lutheran	,029	,026	,025	-,002
Other Protestant	,015	,021	-,010	-,001
Esoteric beliefs (low/high)	-,008	,026	-,075	-,085
Age (young/old)	,015	,071	,082	-,027
Sex (male/female)	-,091	,026	,041	-,050
Education (low/high)	,058	,051	,012	,147
Country (base: France)				
Germany	-,103	-,205	-,066	,070
Austria	-,004	-,202	-,115	-,045
Netherlands	-,104	,025	,017	,030
R <sup>2</sup>	,021	,095	,042	,078

In **table 5** we can see that persons practising their religion (church members who attend religious service) participate significantly more often than others in charitable organisations. In regard to participation in political organisations they do not differ from the rest of the population. The result that the level of participation in political and in charitable activities is more or less the same among respondents with higher scores on esoteric beliefs as in the rest of the population contradicts the widespread opinion that persons with an affinity towards esotericism are less concerned about political and social matters than others. Religious persons are somewhat more likely than others to support honesty as a civil virtue. This result is not surprising, since the biblical commandments prohibit lying, stealing, cheating etc. Persons with an affinity towards esotericism have an opposite tendency according to our data, i.e. they are more likely than others to cheat taxes. A possible explanation for this result might be a higher degree of individualism among these persons.



**Table 6** presents the association between religious and esoteric beliefs on the one hand, and political orientation/party affiliation on the other hand. In Europe, there exists a strong historical association between the more religious segments of the population and certain political parties. In some countries, even the name of particular parties indicate their affinity towards Christian religion, as in the case of the Christlich demokratische Volkspartei (CVP) in Switzerland or the Christdemokratische Union in Germany. But also in other countries, there are Conservative parties, which are close to the main Church, for example, the Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) in Austria and the Partido Popular (PP) in Spain. Socialist, Communist and Liberal parties, on the other hand, have been anti-clerical since their origin in the 19th century. The results by and large confirm that these tendencies of associations between political parties and Christian religiousness persist up to our times: Affiliates of Christian-parties and Center or right conservative parties are more religious, affiliates of socialist and social-democrat parties, and liberal-parties are less religious. Since Multiple Classification analysis allows only a limited number of dependent variables, religious practice was not included in the model; however, additional analyses has shown that the tendencies for religious practice are the same as for religious beliefs.

In all five countries, members of Green party have higher scores on esoteric beliefs. This confirms our hypothesis that New Age-esotericism is linked to Green-ecological political ideology, as we have expected. In France, Switzerland and Austria, the percentage of persons who believe in esoteric phenomena is significantly above the mean also among the voters of right-wing parties: Front National and RPR in France; RDP (FDP) in Switzerland, FPÖ in Austria. This result indicates, that the affinity to occultism and esoteric beliefs can be associated both with left-wing and with right-wing political ideologies.

**Table 6: Religious/Esoteric Beliefs and Political Party Preference**

Multiple Classification Analyses: Control variables: sex, education, age. Parties with  $n < 20$ , adjusted deviations  $< .05$ , and results for sex, education and age have been omitted.

Party affiliation	n=	Ideolog. orientation	Religious beliefs	Esoteric beliefs
GERMANY			Adj. deviation f. mean	Adj. deviation f. mean
CDU/CSU	516	christian-conservative	.25	
FDP	56	center-liberal	-.06	-.19
SPD	493	center-left, socialist	-.08	
PDS	92	left-socialist	-.83	-.25
Grüne	99	left-ecologist		.07
<i>beta</i>			.20	.07
AUSTRIA			Adj. deviation f. mean	Adj. deviation f. mean
FPÖ	139	right-populist	-.21	.06
ÖVP	223	christian-conservative	.39	-.09
SPÖ	278	center-left, socialist	-.09	
Liberales Forum	23	center-left, liberal	-.44	.24
Green	61	left, ecologist	-.18	.05
<i>beta</i>			.20	.06
SWITZERLAND			Adj. deviation f. mean	Adj. deviation f. mean
DU - SVP	90	right, conservative	-.15	
RDP -FdP	156	center-right	-.08	.13
Liberal	38	center-right, liberal	-.15	
CVP	125	center, christian	.62	.07
SPS	245	center-left, socialist	-.37	-.13
Green	47	left, ecologist		.41
<i>beta</i>			.33	.16
FRANCE			Adj. deviation f. mean	Adj. deviation f. mean
Front Nacional	49	right-populist	.19	.35
RPR	147	center-right	.65	.26
UDF	90	center	.56	
Verts (Green)	99	center-left, ecologist	-.17	.17
PS	279	center-left, socialist	-.33	-.10
PC	45	left, communist	-.85	-.66
<i>beta</i>			.34	.21
NETHERLANDS			Adj. deviation f. mean	Adj. deviation f. mean
Calvinist Parties	97	right, conservative	2,24	-.28
CDA (Christian)	277	christian-conservative	.98	
VVD (Liberal)	340	center, conservative	-.44	
D 66	144	center-left	-.41	.06
Green	169	left, ecologist	-.43	.14
PvdA (Labour)	486	left	-.43	
<i>Beta</i>			.54	.08

### 2.3 Additional results from the Austrian appendix to ISSP-1998

The appendix of the Austrian questionnaire of ISSP-1998 included an item list of activities which are considered as typical for the New Age movement (see Stenger 1993, 24 ff.). Respondents were asked whether and how often they have practised these methods. The factor analysis divides the item-battery into two factors: The items with positive loads on factor 1 are: alternative medicine (homeopathy, Bach-Flowers); acupuncture; paying attention at the phases of the moon; Oriental spiritual methods (Yoga etc.), and psychotherapy. All these methods have to do with healing and improving ones psycho-physical wellbeing. I will call this factor *healing methods*. Factor 2 is composed of three items: interpreting the birth-horoscope, Tarot-cards and related techniques, and consulting a fortune-teller. These are *esoteric methods* to predict events and to analyse ones personality.

The factor-scores of these two factors were used for further multivariate analyses, together with the same dependent and independent variables as in tables 4 to 6. The appendix of the Austrian ISSP-questionnaire included also an item about participation in political protest activities, which was used as an additional dependent variable. **Table 7** presents selected results of these analyses. The association between participation in alternative healing methods and esoteric methods on the one hand, and social values on the other hand, is similar to the association which we found for esoteric beliefs in Table 4 and 5. One exception from this rule is the attitude towards modern science. While persons with higher scores on esoteric beliefs tend to have negative attitudes towards modern science, there is no such association, or even a slightly inverse association for persons who practice New Age activities. These inconsistent findings correspond with the ambiguous position of many social scientists in regard to the question of whether New Age should be considered as an anti-modernist or as a modernist social movement (Stenger 1993, 37ff.; Bochsinger 1994, 49ff.; Heelas 1996; 135ff.).

**Table 7 and Table 8** confirm the affinity between New Age and counter-cultural protest-movements: persons who practice esoteric and alternative healing methods are more likely than others to participate in political protest activities. Accordingly, voters of the left-wing liberal parties, the *Green Party* and the *Liberales Forum*, have elevated rates of participation in New Age activities. **Table 8** gives also additional information about the differences between voters of left-wing liberal parties and voters of the right-wing populist FPÖ in regard to esotericism: Voters of all these three parties are somewhat more likely to believe in esoteric phenomena. However, only voters of the Green Party and of the Liberales Forum are also more likely to participate in the New Age-movement, as can be seen by there elevated rates of practising alternative healing and esoteric methods, whereas the electorate of the right-wing FPÖ seem to be more distanced from the New Age movement and its counter-cultural political ideologies. (According to the results of the Austrian survey, the rate of participation in political protest activities is clearly above the average among voters of the left-liberal parties, while this rate is below the average among the voters of the FPÖ).

**Table 7: The Affiliation among Religiousness, Affinity towards New Age and Social Attitudes in Austria, N=1002**

(Pearson correlations and beta-values from multiple regression)

	Homosexual relationship (wrong – not wrong)		Science does more harm than good (agree – disagree)		Participation in political protest activities (no – yes)		Participation in charitable activities (no – yes)	
	r	beta	r	beta	r	beta	r	beta
Religious beliefs (low-high)	-.05	-.08	-.09	-.05	.00	-.01	.07	.02
Church attendance (never–every week)	-.20	-.09	-.11	-.04	-.10	-.03	.06	.07
Esoteric beliefs (low – high)	.16	.08	-.09	-.09	.10	.04	.09	.04
Practicing healing techniques (no- yes)	.19	.06	.05	.06	.16	.08	.08	.05
Practicing esoteric methods (no -yes)	.13	.07	.00	.01	.12	.09	.07	.08
Sex (male – female)	.05	.05	-.13	-.10	-.15	-.14	.02	.00
Age (old - young)	.35	.26	.11	.08	.15	.03	-.01	-.07
Education (low – high)	.20	.08	.16	.09	.30	.21	.10	.11
Rural - Urban	.16	.09	.12	.08	.15	.06	-.01	-.02
Multiple R <sup>2</sup>		.20		.07		.13		.03

**Table 8: Affinity towards New Age and Political Party Preference in Austria**

Adjusted deviations from grand mean and beta values from multiple classification analysis;  
Control-variables: age, sex, education, urban-rural (results omitted in the table).

	n=	Esoteric beliefs (low–high)	Practicing esoteric methods (no – yes)	Practicing healing methods (no – yes)
		<i>Adjusted deviation from mean</i>		
SPÖ (Social Democrats)	276	-.01	.05	-.01
ÖVP (Christian Conservatives)	222	-.10	-.16	.01
FPÖ (right, populist)	139	.06	.06	-.14
Grüne (left, ecologist)	61	.05	.22	.14
Liberales Forum (left, liberal)	23	.23	.01	.48
<i>beta</i>		.07	.11	.15

## **Summary**

The results of the International Social Survey Programme 1998 from five countries (Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland), and the Austrian appendix to this survey confirm that traditional Christian religiosity on the one hand, and the affinity towards esotericism and the New Age movement tend to go together with opposing social and political value systems. Persons with higher scores on Christian beliefs and on religious practice have more restrictive views about sexuality, family and life morality, they are more likely than others to repudiate dishonest behaviour in order to get individual benefits, and tend to prefer Conservative parties or parties which are located in the middle of the political left-right spectrum. Different from this pattern, persons who believe in occult and esoteric phenomena, and who are practising esoteric, spiritual and alternative healing methods, have more liberal attitudes about sexuality, family and life morality, they are less concerned about civic virtues, but they participate more frequently in political protest activities and prefer left-liberal parties, in particular Green parties. The only common trait (among the issues analysed in this study) between religious people and persons who are close to the New Age movement is their disposition to participate in voluntary charitable activities.

The results concerning the moral and political values of persons who are attached to traditional forms of religion are by no means surprising; they correspond to the expectations of common-sense and to the findings of many, many previous empirical studies. More innovative and therefore of higher scientific interest are the results about the social and political values of persons who sympathise with the New Age movement: the value pattern of these persons combines a high degree of individualism and moral liberalism, and a concern for the social and political issues which have been raised by counter-cultural movements such as the ecological and the feminist movement.

Unfortunately, the ISSP-questionnaire is focussed on traditional Christian religion and moral, social and political issues related to this kind of religion. Although the esoteric, spiritual and alternative healing methods of the New Age-movement have become increasingly popular in the Western World during the last decades, and contemporary sociologists of religion have given much attention to this phenomenon, this issue is almost excluded from the ISSP questionnaire. Thus, our analysis in this regard is based on the small data basis of four items about occult and esoteric beliefs. It would be worthwhile for future cross-national surveys on religion to give more attention also to these new forms of religion and the social values related to them.

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