

## **„Europe for Christ!“**

Möllwaldplatz 5  
A-1040 Vienna  
Tel: +43/1/2749898  
[office@europe4christ.net](mailto:office@europe4christ.net)



Dear friends,

September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008

The word *zeitgeist* describes the intellectual and cultural climate of a certain period of time. It not only influences the way people dress or act. The *zeitgeist* influences how we react in certain situations, how many children we have and which profession we choose. A positive *zeitgeist* can help a lot of people's lives and support them in relevant decisions.

Nowadays, the *zeitgeist* is not very friendly to Christians in Europe. A lot of things that are important to us seem completely incomprehensible to the *zeitgeist*. That should not make us afraid but rather motivate us to pass on the Christian faith to the next generation and at the same time try to contribute to the cultural and intellectual climate of our time. Maybe there is hope for the *Zeitgeist*?

In the following you will find a short analysis of the *zeitgeist* by Father Karl Wallner, OCist, Decan of the pontifical academy Heiligenkreuz next to Vienna. This year, he has been recognized worldwide, through the Gregorian chant of his fellow brothers, which are still hitting the charts.

Best regards,

Your Europe for Christ – Team

P.S.: Thank you for your daily prayer for a Christian Europe.

\_ \* \_ \*

### **Short Analysis of the *Zeitgeist***

Josef Karl Wallner

The term *zeitgeist* describes a style of living, fashion, the spiritual atmosphere that rules in the society of a certain time. By definition, the *zeitgeist* is in fluctuation, a fleeting breeze that blows different today than tomorrow. So it's obvious, that a movement like Christianity, which is based on a foundation, that is not random, will always be in tension with the *zeitgeist*. Not only today, but all times!

Christ claims that heaven and earth will fade, but His words won't. He promised that his Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth and that this Spirit will blow wherever He wants. The *zeitgeist* and the Holy Spirit are born enemies; in other words: the *zeitgeist* always needs redemption by the Holy Spirit, so that he knows that he is only a breeze, that will drift away in the next moment. Where are the points of confrontation between the *zeitgeist* and the Holy Spirit today?

First, as Christians we need to be aware, that the liberal *Zeitgeist* of 1968 is "out", is no longer "up-to-date". Christianity is always "conservative", because it has to preserve and pass on godly things through the Holy Spirit – this is its nature. Nowadays some circles in the Church are the last bastion of what is called the "Spirit of 68". I admit that the mentality of 1968 is psychologically not accessible for me, since I was only born at the time. Its revolutionary affectation remains a mystery to me. It may be that they *had* to revolt against the restricting, structural, traditional and hypocritical in society and the church, but what we need today is not less restriction and more self-determination, but orientation, meaning, and order. In the area of faith, the *zeitgeist* of '68 was manifested by wanting to be "modern" at *all* costs. An astonishing inferiority complex captured

theology, like Rudolf Bultmann already put it in the year of 1941: "You can't use electrical lights and a radio set, take up medical and clinical aids in case of illness and at the same time believe in the world of spirits and miracles of the New Testament."<sup>1</sup> Can't we? Theologians of the '68-generation surprisingly didn't become atheists, which had to be expected to be the consequence of their rationalism... But they started to demystify and despiritualise the Christian churches in an almost paranoid mania. And it all came out different than expected: The modern spirit went down and the goddess of postmodernism mounted the throne on the horizon of secularism with a smug smile. Today post-modern people believe in elves, gnomes, life angels, the energy of the trees and the power of yogis and everything possible and impossible - irrational without any problem. The word "respiritualisation" comes from theologians that were intelligent enough to comprehend the turning point. But apparently there is a traumatized generation of 1968, especially in the churches, that can't see the signs of the time. They are still convinced that Christianity will drown if it isn't obeisant to the same term of "modern" as it was 40 years ago. The real "modern" youth of today doesn't need more liberalistic modernism, where everyone is allowed to do whatever he pleases - they can do that anyway - but he wants to discover what really carries through life, what gives order, meaning, and orientation. When there is fruitfulness in the church, when there are young people that live their faith with conviction, then you can be certain that there isn't a liberal soup of randomness cooked (and the menu of secularism will always smell better!), but the fare of the unabbreviated Gospel.

Another phenomenon of today's zeitgeist is egocentrism: As we Christians believe, the Holy Spirit guides into the worship of God and the appreciation of other people. The zeitgeist also teaches us to worship, but the object of worship is nothing but our own self. According to the analysis of the successful trend scout Matthias Horx, we are sliding into the time of supermegagiga-egoism. Horx put it this way: "Where there was WE, there shall be ME" <sup>2</sup>. and "instead of US there will be I". The "WE"; namely the institution, the family, the state, the religion, society, etc, shall be knuckled down to our own ego. This paradigm shift concerns the Church as well as parties and unions. The top value of today's zeitgeist is that everyone is "his own man" or "her own woman". Logically, this results in extreme "eclecticism": Since I'm living after the principal of "I-mine-me-myself", I choose out of the group-value system only what agrees with "I-mine-me-myself". From this it follows that every "I" has a lot of "partial identifications": We agree with what we like in a religion, a party, a value system - but without identifying completely with it.

In case of social values, the Holy Spirit will for sure be gracious with the zeitgeist: where is a party, an institution, etc, which is fully Christian? Here, every Christian will have to go by the principal: Where I find "the most" of Christianity, there I'm home.

But: In the area of faith, the Holy Spirit demands total agreement; he doesn't want to lead into "half the truth" but into "all truth" (Joh. 16, 3). This means: Not half a Christian, but fully a Christian. Where this total identification with the Spirit of God is sought, the fog of the zeitgeist, which so often is an ill spirit, will disperse into nothing. The constant stays firm, because "he who goes with the time, will have to leave with time."

P. Dr. Karl Wallner OCist  
([www.hochschule-heiligenkreuz.at](http://www.hochschule-heiligenkreuz.at))

---

<sup>1</sup> R. BULTMANN, Neues Testament und Mythologie, Nachdruck 1941, hg. von E. Jüngel, München 1988, 16

<sup>2</sup> Matthias HORX, Trendbüro. Trendbuch 2: Megatrends für die späten neunziger Jahre, Düsseldorf 1995, 20.