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**Equal before God, and God Alone:
Cultural Fundamentalism, (Anti-)Egalitarianism and
Christian Rhetoric in Nativist Discourse from Austria and
the US**

by Dr. Bernhard Weidinger

Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance
CRWS Visiting Scholar (Fall 2013)

July 25, 2016



Institute for the
Study of
Societal Issues

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Cultural Fundamentalism, (Anti-)Egalitarianism and
Christian Rhetoric in Nativist Discourse from Austria and the US¹

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Abstract

This article explores the use of Christian rhetoric by nativists in Austria and in the US in the 21st century. Based on a frame analysis of right-wing ephemera, it shows that while the Austrian Freedom Party has increasingly made use of religious allusions since 2005, it references Christianity as a cultural marker rather than as a faith. Ethnicity and culture are found to play a bigger role in Austrian nativist discourse than in the US, where the faith and value dimensions emerge as more prominent. The article describes different manoeuvres nativists perform to reconcile their policies – and the use of Christian rhetoric in this context – with Christian ethics (egalitarianism, hospitality imperative, etc.). Some of these manoeuvres are qualified as manifestations of cultural fundamentalism (Verena Stolcke), including the presentation of segregation as God's will, opposing immigration in the very name of a diligently reframed 'neighbour love', and blanket definitions of culturally 'indigestible' groups of immigrants. Inter-case differences are interpreted as effects from dissimilar traditions of nationalism and faith-politics relations, the distinct makeup of the two right-wing spectra, and demographical peculiarities in immigration flows.

1. Introduction

While the use of Christian references by extreme-right political actors is by no means a new phenomenon, ‘a growing relevance of Christian motifs and themes in the narratives set forth by a substantial number of European extreme-right parties’ has been noted in recent years.³ Zúquete interprets this development as a side effect of a supposed ‘Islamization’ evolving into a ‘basic ... theme of the European extreme right.’⁴ What is striking about it is that, according to Camus, ‘(t)he old link between religion and the extreme right [in Europe]’ had actually ‘been broken’ already with ongoing secularization.⁵ Indeed, some members of the broader party family, including the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), have only recently performed a veritable ‘turn to religion’, that is, to Christianity.⁶ In the US, where Christian references have always featured prominently in the political discourse of the Right and beyond, 9/11 and subsequent anti-Islamic mobilizations have arguably also strengthened pre-existing framings of America as a ‘Christian nation’. In both countries, an increasing salience of immigration seems to have further boosted Christian referencing – and it is precisely these Christian allusions in nativist⁷ discourse that this article is going to explore.

This undertaking is relevant for several reasons. First, linking Christianity to questions of national identity entails the exclusion of (or increased pressure to assimilate on) non-Christian communities, both native and immigrant – especially with mainstream parties increasingly engaging in culturalist debates and using Christianity as an identity marker.⁸ Second, Christian rhetoric increases – among certain audiences at least – the respectability of

³ J. Zúquete, ‘The European extreme-right and Islam: New directions?’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13:3 (2008), pp. 312–344, at 324. See also Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 296. For a discussion of the term ‘extreme right’ and terminological alternatives, see *ibid.*, pp. 11–31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁵ J.-Y. Camus, ‘The European Extreme Right and Religious Extremism’ in Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin and Brian Jenkins (eds) *Varieties of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 107–120.

⁶ N. Marzouki and D. McDonnell, ‘Populism and Religion’ in *id.* and Olivier Roy (eds) *Saving the People: How Populist Parties hijack Religion* (final draft of a volume forthcoming 2016 from Hurst, London), pp. 107–120, at 11. For the Austrian case, see L. Hadj-Abdou, ‘The “religious conversion” of the Austrian populist radical right’ in the same volume.

⁷ Nativism, according to Mudde, ‘constitutes the core of the ideology of the larger [populist radical right] party family’ and can be defined as ‘an ideology’ holding that ‘states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state’ (Mudde, *op. cit.*, p. 19, emphasis omitted). I adapt this definition in order to also account for actors prepared to tolerate a limited amount of immigrants who they consider both willing and able to assimilate.

⁸ Marzouki/McDonnell, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

nativist politics, their proponents' appeal and the moral legitimacy ascribed to them. Third, a shared commitment to a Christian heritage and shared notions of the alleged threats to such (Islam, the Left, liberalism, global elites) facilitate cross-border right-wing cooperation.

Of course, Christian references feature in immigration debates in various shapes and forms. On both sides of the Atlantic, advocates of pro-immigrant policies also make use of them, invoking the universalist and egalitarian traditions in Christian thought. The question as to how these traditions are philosophically and rhetorically reconciled with nativism, an intrinsically anti-egalitarian ideology, will be addressed here based on a comparison of the American and the Austrian cases.

2. Literature Review

As Mudde notes, despite an abundance of research on 'populist radical right parties', the relationship between them and religion 'has received only scant attention in the literature so far'.⁹ The attitude nativist parties and organizations in Europe display towards Christianity is drawing considerably less interest than their attitude towards Islam.¹⁰ In the US, with its strong 'Christian Right' movement, the role of Christianity for the political Right has been garnering attention for decades.¹¹ Here, we are confronted with a relative lack of research on immigration as a subject matter of right-wing politics,¹² an indication of the immigration topic ranking lower on American right-wing agendas as compared to most European countries. For Europe, Zúquete addressed the right-wing turn to religion, whereas Camus dealt with the relation of right-wing and religious extremism.¹³ For the FPÖ and Christianity, relevant works include several articles focusing on anti-Islamic agitation, as well as a 2012 master's thesis.¹⁴ Religion as a factor in immigration discourse and the effects of immigration

⁹ Mudde, op. cit., p. 296.

¹⁰ See for instance H.-G. Betz, 'Mosques, Minarets, Burqas and other Essential Threats: The Populist Right's Campaign against Islam in Western Europe' in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral (eds) *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 71–87.

¹¹ See, for example, Clyde Wilcox and Carin Larson, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder: Westview, 2006); C. Berlet, 'Christian identity: the apocalyptic style, political religion, palingenesis and neo-fascism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5:3 (2004), pp. 469–506.

¹² For a notable exception, see S. Diamond, 'Right-Wing Politics and the Anti-Immigration Cause', *Social Justice* 23:3 (1996), pp. 154–168.

¹³ Op. cit.

¹⁴ L. Hadj-Abdou and S. Rosenberger (2013), 'Islam at Issue. Anti-Islamic Mobilization of the Extreme Right in Austria' in Brian Jenkins, Emmanuel Godin and Andrea Mammone (eds) *Varieties*

on religious pluralism are addressed in a transatlantic perspective by Casanova.¹⁵ Others have dedicated themselves to illuminating whether and why religiosity makes people more or less susceptible to adopting anti-immigration stances.¹⁶ As to the specific issue of Christian referencing in nativist discourse, this article sets out to explore new ground with the definitive work forthcoming in 2016, including articles on the FPÖ's 'religious turn' and on Christianity and the American Tea Party movement.¹⁷

3. Theoretical Framework

The American Declaration of Independence states as a 'self-evident' truth that 'all men are created equal, ... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights'. The same – without the religious reference – is implied in the European Convention on Human Rights' non-discrimination clause (Article 14). As the Christian notion that all people are created in the image of God constitutes a challenge for Christian nativists, so does the liberal postulate of fundamental equality for their secular counterparts. Traditional racism responded to the idea of universal human equality by denying, in association with sexism and classism, large groups of people full membership to the human race, and thus, to the very subject of human rights. While this stance became increasingly viewed as factually untenable and morally illegitimate in modern liberal democracies, awarding unequal rights to citizens and non-citizens has remained a foundational principle of liberal politics until today. The ideological underpinning it requires is provided by the idea of the nation-state as the political manifestation of a certain people (or nation) living in a unified territory under one government, a notion that merged political/civic and cultural/ethnic entities from the late 18th century onwards.

of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 149–163; M. Krzyżanowski, 'From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia: Continuities and Shifts in Recent Discourses and Patterns of Political Communication of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)' in Wodak/KhosraviNik/Mral, op. cit., pp. 135–148; D. Meijer, 'FPÖ und Christentum. Zwischen Gegnerschaft und Vereinnahmung' [The FPÖ and Christendom. Between Enmity and Usurpation] (Master's thesis, University of Vienna, 2012).

¹⁵ J. Casanova, 'Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A EU/US Comparison', Paper presented at Georgetown University, Washington, 2005.

¹⁶ See P. Ben-Nun Bloom, G. Arikan and M. Courtemanche, 'Religious Social Identity, Religious Belief, and Anti-Immigration Sentiment', *American Political Science Review*, 109:2 (2015), pp. 203–221, at 203–205; Davidson and C. Garcia, 'Welcoming the Stranger. Religion and Attitudes toward Social Justice for Immigrants in the U.S.', *Journal of Religion & Society*, 16 (2014), pp. 1–21, at 15.

¹⁷ Marzouki/McDonnell/Roy, op. cit. (see footnote 4).

In terms of determining the boundaries between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, the role of *culture* has remained a contentious matter to date. More often than not, nativists go beyond the mere technicality that is a person's place of birth, and resort to what Stolcke denominates ‘cultural fundamentalism’¹⁸: a complex of ideological manoeuvres designed to legitimize ‘the exclusion of *foreigners* or *strangers*’ while, in principle, affirming the equality postulate. In this doctrine, humanity is divided into cultures, which are not (or not explicitly) ordered hierarchically, but spatially. Rather than decrying the ‘other’, cultural fundamentalism ‘exalts the absolute, irreducible difference of the “self” and the incommensurability of different cultural identities.’ Cultural mixing shall be prevented (or, positively framed, identities shall be preserved) for the good of all.¹⁹ For this article, I propose two modifications to Stolcke's concept in order to have it capture a wider range of contemporary phenomena. First, I think it makes sense to also denote as cultural-fundamentalist the defenders of a dominant culture who acknowledge the possibility of individual assimilation (as opposed to the notion of an actual ‘absolute, irreducible difference’). Depending, among other things, on whether culture is seen as tied to a specific ethnic group and/or religion, these cultural fundamentalists may be willing to tolerate a certain (mostly rather limited) amount of immigration.²⁰ Second, I do not consider the premise of a ‘natural propensity to reject strangers’²¹ a necessary feature, although rooting xenophobia in human nature is indeed a common self-legitimizing tool in nativist discourse, complementing the equally essentialist assumption of an innate inability to shed one's cultural heritage.

Considering its premise that a mixing of cultures is not desirable and would lead to a loss of identity with severe consequences for individuals and communities alike, cultural fundamentalism can be characterized as a doctrine of segregation and exclusion put forward in universalist terms. By depicting ‘others’ as a threat to the in-group's customs, values and traditions without denying them full humanity, it proves functional for nativist agendas under liberal-democratic conditions, blending in well with both secular and religious lines of argument. In both cases, religion often serves as a key criterion for delineating cultural likeness and belonging. ‘For contemporary right-wing populists in Western democracies,’ the primary political driving force of nativism in these countries, ‘the main “others” are almost

¹⁸ V. Stolcke, ‘New rhetorics of exclusion in Europe’, *International Social Science Journal*, 51:159 (1999), pp. 25–35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27 (emphases i.O.).

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

always immigrants and, in particular since 9/11, Muslims.²²

The integration of religious notions in nativist policies is, however, not devoid of pitfalls. Among other things, Christian egalitarianism and universalism have to be accounted for. According to the Bible, or at the very least, a certain Biblical exegesis, ‘all human beings are created alike in the image of God’, ‘have equal dignity as children of our Father in heaven’, ‘are equal before him’, ‘and Jesus reaches out to them all’.²³ Accordingly, equality has been described as ‘an unshakable principle of the Christian tradition’²⁴, an assessment that led the French ‘Nouvelle Droite’ to reject Christianity as an egalitarian ideology, along with liberalism and leftism. Of course, neither the practices nor the teachings of Christians have been consistently egalitarian over the centuries, to put it mildly. Todorov, in his discussion of colonial Spanish attitudes via the ‘Indians’, points out that slavery and massacres were legitimized in the name of Christianity, as well as the subjugation of women.²⁵ He stays clear of explaining these occurrences away as unchristian aberrations and rather problematizes the Christian-egalitarian standpoint also. Whereas colonial anti-egalitarians interpreted a perceived difference as inequality, equality as maintained by the likes of Bartolomé de las Casas came coupled with the assumption of (and pressure to assume) identity. Todorov refers to this position as the ‘prejudice of equality’.²⁶ The ‘Indians’ were declared equal just as they were declared unequal before, that is, based on Spanish (Christian) standards, and in relation to the Christian God. The assertion of their humanity was tied to ‘their Christian “nature”’²⁷ – the assumption that they already shared Christian traits and morals, and could, and were to be turned into believers. Equality was affirmed as a potential rather than as a reality – a potential that was to be realized by approximation to the European-Christian ideal. Difference was not reconciled with equality, but perceived as a temporal quality that had to be unilaterally overcome. One might see somewhat of a parallel in present-day immigration debates, where many a voice conditions the acceptance of immigrants on their ability and/or readiness to culturally assimilate, or denies them outright one or both of these dispositions. Equality may

²² Marzouki/McDonnell, op. cit, p. 8.

²³ A. Padgett, ‘What Is Biblical Equality?’, *Priscilla Papers*, 16:3 (2002), pp. 22–25.

²⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America. The Question of the Other* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), pp. 147 and 161.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, particularly pp. 146–167. In terms of the man-woman and Spaniard-Indian relation, Todorov notes an ‘easy transition from internal to the external *other*’ in anti-egalitarian Christian thought (*ibid.*, p. 153, emphasis i.O.).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

still be affirmed here as an abstract notion, but negated in the sense of equal treatment.

Summing up, not only were and are the correct interpretation and political consequences of universalist and egalitarian notions in Christianity subjects of controversy, but these notions themselves are, too. That being said, my point here is that Christian scripture contains notions (most prominently that of equality), virtues and values (such as compassion, hospitality and neighbour love) that nativists using Christian rhetoric today in order to legitimize their politics have to deal with, be it explicitly or implicitly.

4. Research Question

It is the corresponding rhetorical and argumentative efforts that this article will explore. I will analyse the occurrence of Christian reasoning and references in nativist discourse in Austria and the US since the turn of the millennium. In doing so, I explore how nativists deploy, interpret and (re)frame Christian motifs and notions to legitimize their agenda, more specifically: to bridge the gap between (liberal and Christian) egalitarian ideals on the one hand and politics of discrimination and exclusion on the other. In a comparative perspective, I examine what differences can be identified between the two cases in this regard, and briefly interpret them, pointing out relevant specificities in national history, polity, and political culture. I will not go into explaining the emergence of nativist sentiment or electoral success. Also, rather than discussing *why* religion is used by nativists, I will confine myself to studying and interpreting the *ways* in which it is used. While the article will illustrate how religion can be put at the service of diverse and even contrary political agendas by accentuating certain notions and traditions over others, I will refrain from taking stances on the theological validity of different scriptural readings.

5. Methodology

In order to answer the questions outlined above, I performed a qualitative text analysis of original sources, guided by the frame analytical approach. Language is understood here as not only an instrument to label reality, but as a ‘mode of definition and construction of reality’²⁸ – not only denoting, but also creating, political issues as such. Framing can then be understood as ‘a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex

²⁸ P. Donati, ‘Die Rahmenanalyse politischer Diskurse’ [The Frame Analysis of Political Discourse] in Reiner Keller et al. (eds) *Handbuch sozialwissenschaftliche Diskursanalyse*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: VS, 2011), pp. 159–191, at 181. All quotes from this article are my translation.

reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analysing, persuading, and acting.²⁹ The act of framing is highly political, as can be shown by the example of interpreting increased ethno-cultural diversity as an ‘Islamisation’ of the ‘Christian Occident’. Beyond offering orientation, this framing manoeuvre creates not only the threat itself, but also a cultural-geographical entity, a dangerous Them and a noble Us, equips both with specific traits and awards the Us with a pressing historical mission (the defence of the ‘Christian Occident’). Central to the framing process, according to Donati, is the application of familiar patterns to new objects and events.³⁰ Frames, he writes, are ‘categories ... that are already present in the culture or memory of the actors’³¹ – like the topos of a new ‘*Türkenbelagerung*’ in Austria, invoking memory of the Ottoman sieges of Vienna 1529 and 1683, and employed by the FPÖ to problematise the increase in the local Muslim population.

Inasmuch as culture is impregnated by religion, it is no surprise that non-religious actors will also occasionally resort to religious topoi, taking from the cultural ‘tool box’ (Ann Swidler) whatever fits their political and social interests.³² Analysing these tools can provide insights into features of American and Austrian culture and society, such as the specific brand of hegemonic nationalism. According to Donati, texts tend to evoke a particular frame by emphasizing or disguising certain aspects.³³ In the cases presented here, nativists can be expected to counter Christian egalitarians by emphasizing certain scriptural notions, but also certain historical references over others and by re-framing Christian moral imperatives according to their agenda. Just like in other ‘interpretative battles’, frames hereby serve as ‘the fundamental tools’.³⁴

The body of sources analysed comprises right-wing ephemera – flyers, leaflets, blog entries, newsletters, press releases – and programmatic writings (party programmes, manifestos) from 2000 onward. For the American case study, they were retrieved from the People of the American Way Collection of Conservative Political Ephemera at UC Berkeley, and complemented with online sources for the most recent years. For Austria, relevant materials

²⁹ M. Rein and D. Schön, ‘Reframing Policy Discourse’ in Frank Fischer and John Forester (eds) *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 145–166, at 146.

³⁰ Donati, op. cit., pp. 164 and 181.

³¹ Ibid., p. 164.

³² Ibid., p. 162.

³³ Ibid., p. 179.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 166 (emphases omitted).

were accessed at the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance in Vienna (Right-Wing Extremism Collection).

In approaching the material, I first identified texts addressing immigration. Aided by the *Atlas.ti* QDA software, these were coded for stances taken on the issue and for arguments they provided to support these stances. Special attention was then given to passages containing Christian references and to those dealing with (in)equality and diversity. These passages were then coded for, among other things, claims about national identity/claims to cultural hegemony (e.g. ‘Christian nation’, ‘*christliches Abendland*’ [Christian Occident], ‘Judeo-Christian heritage’), about – explicitly or implicitly Christian – moral guidelines such as ‘neighbour love’, ‘compassion’ or [Protestant] work ethic, about perceived threats (‘Islamisation’, ‘multiculturalism’), and cultural-religious symbols like the cross, minaret, and veil. Some of the supporting questions asked included: Who is the ‘neighbour’ that, according to the Bible, ‘thou shalt love ... as thyself’? Does Biblical equality extend to all humans? Are there other Biblical/ethical principles that actors wish to complement (or limit) the equality principle with, such as the rule of law or respect for authorities? Also, I coded for differences (or bits of text indicative thereof) in background between the two cases, including, among others, church-state relations, concepts of nationhood, immigration history, and immigrant demographics. As in any type of discourse analysis, text was scrutinized not only on the level of content, but of language, too – considering that frames need not be unfolded explicitly in the text. Aside from connotation, symbolism, metonymy and other rhetorical figures, metaphors received particular attention. This is owing to their nature as ‘condensed analogies’,³⁵ serving as a bridge between the recipients' cultural repertoire and speakers' interpretation of phenomena, which makes them the ideal framing tool.

Case Selection

The selection of cases, beyond serving pragmatic considerations of language proficiency, source availability and familiarity with cultural backgrounds, accounts for both fundamental similarities and important politico-cultural differences. Similarities of relevance include Christianity as the majority religion and potential marker of ‘nativeness’, as well as both a historical and current (nativist) politicization of immigration. Also, Marzouki/McDonnell observe from a cross-country perspective that the right-wing populist ‘arguments regarding

³⁵ Donati, op. cit., p. 172.

religion' have experienced 'a significant standardization ... over the past fifteen years or so.'³⁶ The assumption was that this common ground would facilitate identifying both overarching and case-specific features of Christian referencing in nativist discourse. While different practices hint at differences in backgrounds (e.g., the historically different role of religion in the political sphere), similarities, despite dissimilar circumstances, should provide more universal insights regarding the functionality of Christian rhetoric for nativist purposes. Of course, the two-case setting does not allow for generalization.

For Austria, it makes sense to focus on a single political actor: the FPÖ, a party with remarkable success in electoral terms and by far the most relevant clearly nativist force in Austrian politics. For the US, with a population nearly 40 times as numerous, I investigate a range of non-partisan right-wing organizations. I gave these organizations preference over the most important American right-wing institutional actor, the Republican Party. Both its size and heterogeneity make the GOP difficult, if not impossible to handle in a research setting with very limited resources and the comparatively tiny FPÖ as its counterpart. Instead, I selected six extra-parliamentarian right-wing organizations:³⁷ some form part of the Christian Right, some are secular; some operate nationwide, others do not; some put nativism at the core of their agenda, others seldom address immigration altogether. The selection thus accounts for diversity within right-wing approaches while at the same time remaining manageable in scope. It bears repeating that this article is concerned less with concrete actors than with the arguments they put forth and with the circumstances under which they operate.

6. Findings

Legitimizing Nativism on Christian Grounds

As noted before, Christian scripture offers arguments for a variety of standpoints on immigration. As a peculiarity of the American case, not only progressive Christians, but also parts of the Christian Right positively reference the Christian obligation to 'show hospitality to strangers' (Hebrews 13:2) or, like then Republican congressman Mike Pence at the Christian Right's Values Voter Summit 2006, appeal to the proscription not to 'mistreat the

³⁶ Marzouki/McDonnell, op. cit., p. 12.

³⁷ American Family Association (AFA); American Immigration Control Foundation (AICF); Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration (EBI); Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR); Focus on the Family (FotF); Minuteman Civil Defense Corps (Minuteman HQ).

alien in your midst, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt'.³⁸ 'God loved the foreigner' and 'Christians should show compassion and hospitality to outsiders', the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) argues, based on Bible quotes, in its 2009 resolution on immigration.³⁹ Barrett Duke and Richard Land, then president and vice-president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, deliver a model example of a theologically underpinned Christian egalitarianism applied to immigration issues.⁴⁰

For anti-immigrant voices employing Christian rhetoric, different modes of argumentation can be found. One consists of opposing multiculturalism and (certain groups of) immigrants not in defiance, but in emphatic defence of the equality notion. For the American Family Association (AFA), Ed Vitagliano problematizes Islam, alleging that the religion rejects 'Western notions of equality of all people' and of 'equal dignity, a Christian idea', respectively.⁴¹ Whereas Vitagliano mainly discusses religious freedom in Islamic societies and does not explicitly address immigration policy, it is worth noting he frames equality as both a liberal and Christian idea here – an idea 'which undergirds the entire premise of religious freedom.'⁴² Along these lines, equal treatment must be denied certain newcomers not because they are unequal, but because they themselves do not respect the equality of others, and denied freedom of religion because they are expected to undermine this very principle.

This kind of thinking is structurally related to another form of legitimizing unequal treatment, as both overlay the universalist notion of (one) humankind with particularisms. While Vitagliano very concretely addresses 'the' Islamic culture, the following argument by the Evangelicals for Biblical Immigration (EBI) is more abstract in nature. Engaging both universalism and the hospitality imperative, they write:

God loves us all, the sojourner and the citizen. ... At the same time, He has purposefully placed us ... into families, tribes and nations. ... He is a God of love and of order, peace, freedom from debt, wise boundaries, and of nations. In some contexts Scripture teaches us to welcome. In other contexts it teaches us to

³⁸ Cited in P. Chamberlain and T. Ramos, 'Nativist Bedfellows. The Christian Right Embraces Anti-Immigrant Politics', *The Public Eye*, 23:2 (2008), pp. 17–23, at 17.

³⁹ NAE, 'Immigration 2009', 2009, <http://nae.net/immigration-2009/>.

⁴⁰ B. Duke and R. Land, 'Just Immigration Reform: Foundational Principles', *Regent Journal of Law and Public Policy*, 3:1 (2011), pp. 67–94.

⁴¹ E. Vitagliano, 'Mosque and State', 2008, http://www.afajournal.org/0108mosque_state.asp. The latter is a direct quote from Iranian journalist Amir Taheri.

⁴² Ibid.

be distinct, set apart, and, at times, to build walls.⁴³

Once the distinction of people by nationality and the existence of boundaries are established as biblical principles, the EBI draw up another distinction. According to the organization, Christians are called upon ‘to discern among “sojourners” (like Ruth and Rahab who intend to assimilate and bless) and “foreigners” (who do not intend to assimilate and bless) and to welcome the former with hospitality.’⁴⁴ For the American Immigration Control Foundation (AICF), president John Vinson explains that ‘stranger’ in the Biblical sense denotes an individual, not ‘a massive influx of foreigners’, and not even necessarily a foreign person. Furthermore, he suggests that the biblical hospitality imperative might in fact apply to relations between Christians only.⁴⁵ According to this logic, all people are equally called to salvation, but only those who have already accepted Christ as their saviour are to be considered full equals. This resembles Spanish colonial views referenced earlier and, more generally, the brand of egalitarianism that helped legitimize European claims to power through the Enlightenment era: equality as a potential rather than a reality, attributed based on standards set by the in-group and thus attainable only by means of assimilation.

Moreover, Vinson writes with reference to the Old Testament, the principle that strangers were to be treated as natives and loved by the Israelites as themselves usually referred to ‘foreigners who came for a time and left’. Also, according to him, biblical Israel welcomed strangers ‘only on the condition that they obeyed the laws’, a principle that, he maintains, rules out unauthorized immigrants from being entitled to the same treatment.⁴⁶ Beyond distinguishing peoples (or nations) from one another, different kinds of strangers are defined here, repudiating the idea that Christians are called upon to act hospitably and compassionately without condition. In addition to the distinctions drawn between natives and strangers and different kinds of strangers, respectively, Vinson discerns different value systems. The Bible, he argues, confirms ‘a separate set of ethics for governments of nations,

⁴³ EBI, ‘An Open Letter to the Congress of the United States of America’, 2013, <http://evangelicalsforbiblicalimmigration.com/read-the-letter>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ J. Vinson, ‘Amnesty for Illegal Immigrants: A Policy of False Compassion’, 2010, http://www.immigrationcontrol.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/33727_Immigration_Brochure.pdf, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Vinson, op. cit., p. 1. Biblical Israel is used as a model and reference point by pro-immigration advocates, too. The NAE, for instance, argues that ‘the people of God were not to forget that they had been strangers in Egypt’ (NAE, op. cit.) – an argument combinable with a reminder that the US are a nation of immigrants themselves.

as opposed to individuals,’ as well as for ‘inner-Christian’ versus inter-religious relations. The primary role of governments was ‘to maintain order’. Mercy, on the other hand, ‘by nature is primarily a virtue of the individual heart.’ In sum, Vinson views biblical calls for hospitality as applicable to relations between ‘individual Christians, rather than (as) a prescription for a nation's immigration policy.’⁴⁷ The same individualization of ethics is frequently used on social media by FPÖ mandataries and supporters alike, as in the argument that pro-asylum advocates should host refugees in their own houses. It serves to depoliticize immigration while at the same time legitimizing a restrictive political management thereof.

Instead of, or complementing, the de-universalisation of Christian values, nativists may also opt to affirm the ethical notions that pro-immigrant advocates operate with, and turn these notions around against them. Vinson himself argues that ‘it is not compassionate to weaken our rule of law’ through a permissive immigration policy, or to encourage ‘the unending illegal entry of foreigners who take jobs and benefits from poor and disadvantaged Americans.’⁴⁸ Likewise, the EBI, in an open letter on the 2013 immigration reform bill S.744, acknowledge that ‘the Bible teaches us to be kind to the sojourner’, adding that ‘it also teaches that kindness ... ought not to be injustice to local citizens and their unique culture.’ The US Senate should therefore ‘consider ... [o]ur poor. Our widows. Our unemployed’, before agreeing on a bill with ‘unbiblical’ repercussions.⁴⁹

Interpreting Christian values or applying Christian rhetoric in ways that play natives and immigrants off against each other is a common pattern both in Austrian and American nativism. A prime example is the reframing of ‘neighbour love’ [German: *Nächstenliebe*] as love towards those of one's own kin, nation, or culture. The term has acquired an important role in Freedomite propaganda since Heinz-Christian Strache took over party chairmanship in 2005. The very next year, the FPÖ advocated European migration and asylum (sic) policies that do not place ‘love of the remotest’ [*Fernstenliebe*] over neighbour love,⁵⁰ which, in German, literally translates as love towards ‘the next one’. In 2008, Strache defined the FPÖ's ‘socio-political credo’ as ‘social responsibility for Austria first according to the principle of

⁴⁷ Vinson, op. Cit., p. 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ EBI, op. cit.

⁵⁰ Press release, 12 December 2006. All FPÖ translations in this article are my own unless stated otherwise.

neighbour love'.⁵¹ In 2012, prominent party elder and MEP Andreas M \ddot{u} lzer accused an Austrian human rights organization of 'enjoying themselves in an academic, esoteric love of the remotest' while not 'giving a shit about their own'.⁵² The year after, the FP \ddot{O} put neighbour love at the very centre of its national elections campaign. Under the motto 'A politics of "neighbour love"', the campaign featured election posters reading 'LOVE thy NEIGHBOURS. For me, that means our AUSTRIANS' and 'High time for "NEIGHBOUR LOVE"', accompanied by demands to give priority to the social needs of 'our own people' [*unsere Leut'*]. The term appeared in quotation marks here, apparently emphasizing the semantic twist given to it. Whereas the election program folder defined the 'own people' via citizenship rather than by cultural features, it also emphasized the conservation of 'the' Austrian identity, culture, and values.⁵³

What can be observed here is an anti-universalist reframing of the neighbour love maxim: according to the Freedom Party, all humans are equal, but not everyone is considered a 'neighbour'.⁵⁴ Neighbour status is not awarded on spatial grounds (as it does not extend to immigrants), but via both formal (citizenship) and cultural criteria (similarity/sameness). In the culturalist logic, Serbians or Christians from Syria, hailing from a supposedly similar cultural environment, qualify for 'neighbour' status – and the privilege of hospitable treatment that is attached to it – more easily than, e.g., Turks or Syrian Sunnis.⁵⁵

Over Strache's tenure, the FP \ddot{O} has been displaying a pattern of using Christian references (also) as calculated provocations to draw attention via criticism from non-nativist Christians, both lay and clergy.⁵⁶ Confronted with rebuttals of his ethnocentric interpretation of neighbour love, Strache was quick to announce that '(w)e do not engage in theological debate. That we leave to the competent experts. ... For us, it is about the value itself, which is a general human one' – and whose usage or definition must not be monopolized by

⁵¹ Press release, 8 February 2008.

⁵² Interview in *MO*, 2012-12, p. 19.

⁵³ FP \ddot{O} , election folder 'LIEBE deine N \ddot{A} CHSTEN', 2013, p. 11. Of course, discriminating against citizens based on ethnicity would contravene current law.

⁵⁴ Interestingly, the party rediscovers universalism when faced with allegations of instrumentalising or misinterpreting a Christian value: neighbour love, Strache explained in a press release from 2013 (12 August 2013), was 'not only a religious value, but a universally human one'.

⁵⁵ See for example Strache, interviewed by *Der Standard*, 30 October 2014.

⁵⁶ Representatives of Christian Churches have repeatedly issued statements defining neighbour love as a disposition to behave towards any person in need as if they were one's neighbour, including those 'who seem farthest away' (declaration by the Austrian Catholic Bishops' Conference, 1997, quoted in Hadj-Abdou, op. cit., p. 64). Likewise, cf. e.g. Duke/Land, op. cit., p. 79f for the US.

anybody.⁵⁷ In fact, the debate on the universal and egalitarian dimension of neighbour love was arguably very much a theological one, although Strache stopped short of quoting Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther as Haider had done in disputes with Catholic and Protestant bishops, respectively.⁵⁸

Incidence of Christian Rhetoric

Overall, Christian references are more frequent, more explicit and more theologically informed in the material investigated for the American case. This may not come as a surprise, considering both the persistently strong amalgamation of faith and politics in the US, compared to other liberal democracies,⁵⁹ and the relative importance of Christian Right groups in particular. The omnipresence of Christian referencing extends beyond anti-immigration circles and applies to supporters of legalization legislation and immigrants' rights among the (Christian) Right, too. Hard-line conservative stances on issues like abortion give little indication of immigration policy standpoints and may come coupled with emphatic appeals to compassion and the 'Golden Rule', or pleas for family reunification as both a conservative and a Christian matter of the heart. In Austria, on the other hand, Christian referencing with a pro-immigrant thrust was found among Christian progressives, not in Freedomite party discourse.

What became noticeable, however, is that the FPÖ has increased Christian referencing under Strache's chairmanship. This is particularly interesting considering the tradition of the party and the socio-political camp it represents, a camp striving to reduce clerical influence (Roman-Catholic in particular) on Austrian politics and society since the 19th century. The FPÖ itself has been emphasizing the separation of church and state since its foundation in 1956. The 'Christian turn' since 2005 advanced a process rudimentarily initiated by Haider in the 1990s. While the latter reached out to self-defined Christians on several occasions in order to lure parts of the People's Party's (ÖVP) core electorate away, Strache made Christian talk a central part of the party's rhetoric.⁶⁰ Both party leaders positioned the FPÖ as the (only)

⁵⁷ Press release, 14 August 2013.

⁵⁸ Hadj-Abdou, op. cit., p. 65f.

⁵⁹ See Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), especially chapters 9 to 11; in contrast, see Günter Bischof, Hermann Denz and Anton Pelinka (eds), *Religion in Austria* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005) for the Austrian case.

⁶⁰ Symbolic politics formed a notable part of the FPÖ's approximation towards Christianity. For instance, Haider met Pope John Paul II twice. Strache, in an interview with a right-wing Catholic

alternative for social conservatives fed up with the allegedly ongoing liberalization of the ÖVP. At the same time, Strache's assertion that the FPÖ had never been more determined to defend the 'Christian-occidental tradition' than under his chairmanship⁶¹ indicates another peculiarity of the Austrian case that will be elaborated on later: the FPÖ's Christian rhetoric differs from American Christian Right discourse inasmuch that it is not actually based on a perception of Christianity as a source of absolute truth, but as a pillar of the autochthonous culture. Without prejudice to individual Freedomite politicians' personal beliefs, Christianity appears to be viewed by the party as one among several registers in which (nativist) messages can be delivered, rather than as a moral compass.

Religion as Criterion of In-/Exclusion

In general, religion as a feature co-defining 'Us' and 'Them' is more important in the material studied for Austria than in the sources from the US. This may come as a surprise, given the prominence of religion in American political discourse overall and its significance for the Christian Right in particular. A demographical perspective can help interpret this phenomenon. In Austria, countries with a Muslim (relative) majority population rank second (Turkey, 11.7 per cent) and third (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11.1 per cent), respectively, among the countries of birth of foreign born residents.⁶² However, the influx from these countries is, by and large, a thing of the past and a majority of recent immigrants (not accounting for the exceptional refugee flows from the Middle East since 2015) have been EU citizens.⁶³ As far as Austria is concerned, the observation that 'in continental Europe ..., immigration and Islam are almost synonymous'⁶⁴ therefore clearly reflects a discursive (or framing) effect rather than a fact. Contrasting the numbers with the situation in the US, where Muslims make up a mere four per cent of the American foreign-born population according to a recent PEW survey,⁶⁵ and where the Muslim population is less dominated by migrants and more diverse in socio-economic terms and national origins,⁶⁶ it still becomes understandable why religion (or, essentially, Islam) constitutes a bigger factor in the Austrian immigration

Austrian periodical, qualified his own encounter with Benedict XVI as 'one of the greatest moments of my life' (*Neue Ordnung*, No. IV, 2007, p. 11).

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶² Statistik Austria, *Statistisches Jahrbuch Österreichs 2014* (Vienna: self-published, 2013), p. 52.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁴ Casanova, op. cit., p. 4.

⁶⁵ PEW Research Center, 'America's Changing Religious Landscape', 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Casanova, op. cit., 5.

discourse. In a nutshell, religion appears as a more serviceable tool here when it comes to construing (unwanted) immigrants as inherently different. In contrast, it is less well-suited for othering purposes in the US, where a majority of immigrants in general, and an even larger share of Latino immigrants, the main target of nativist rejection, hail from Christian (predominantly Catholic) backgrounds. While earlier waves of American nativism featured strong anti-Catholic sentiment, combining religious and racist (White nationalist) motives,⁶⁷ the explicitly anti-Catholic ticket is not available to nativists anymore: Catholicism is now the biggest single congregation in the US and Catholics hold key positions within the Christian Right. However, the equation of ‘Protestant religious identity with being American’⁶⁸ is still championed by relevant actors, which will be discussed later.

A nativist rejection of Muslim immigrants, including their depiction as an unassimilable, ‘indigestible’ group,⁶⁹ is observable in both countries. Islam is presented as an indicator of immigrants' incompatibility with the host society in terms of values in Austria and in the US alike. However, Austrian nativist discourse features Islam as a marker of ethnic difference more frequently. This phenomenon, arguably owing to the local tradition of ethnic nationalism,⁷⁰ offers an additional explanation for the relative importance of religion in Austrian nativism. Here, religious otherness has replaced the notion of racial otherness to some extent – not only via the value argument, but also rather directly. Starting with Strache's election to party chairmanship in 2005, ‘the FPÖ no longer fought *Überfremdung* [literally: over-foreignisation, B.W.], but *Islamisierung*’, not replacing established enemy images (including the anti-Semitic one), but complementing ‘its (culturalist) racism with an anti-Muslim variant’.⁷¹ Accompanying this shift, the boundaries between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ were redrawn; in order to make the discursive exclusion of Muslims from the Austrian collective

⁶⁷ ‘Backlash against ... Irish and Italian immigrants was informed by the prevailing view that these populations were neither Christian nor white’, which highlights the mutability of supposedly ‘natural’ concepts such as race (Chamberlain/Ramos, op. cit., p. 19).

⁶⁸ Ben-Nun Bloom et al., op. cit., p. 206.

⁶⁹ Samuel Huntington, *Who are we? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 188 (self-quotation from *Clash of Civilizations*).

⁷⁰ Mudde rightfully denotes that ‘nationalism always includes political/civic and cultural/ethnic aspects’ and thus ‘a combination of (elements of) ethnic and state nationalism’ (Mudde, op. cit., p. 17). The distinction drawn here is therefore one by tendency. Value and ethnic reasoning are not mutually exclusive, but deeply intertwined.

⁷¹ Heribert Schiedel, *Extreme Rechte in Europa* [The Extreme Right in Europe] (Vienna: Steinbauer, 2011), p. 51. For a more in-depth assessment of the FPÖ's somewhat ambiguous relationship with Islam, see *ibid.*, pp. 51–56 and (for anti-Semitic continuities) pp. 57–73; for the party's own account, see FPÖ, ‘Wir und der Islam’ [We and Islam], 2008, https://rfjfreistadt.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/wir_und_der_islam_-_freiheitliche_positionen1.pdf.

plausible, the Christian element in the definition of the in-group had to be emphasized. With the anti-clerical (and partly anti-religious) torch still being passed on among the FPÖ's more traditionalist officials and core electorate, this emphasis could not be made in overly religious rhetoric. Hence, the concept of 'cultural' Christianity was introduced. This also catered to the rough third (29%) of Austrians who a 2010 study identified as *kämpferische Kulturchristen* [militant cultural Christians]⁷² – both a considerable electoral potential and likely in part an effect of the Freedomite agitation. The high percentage can be seen as further indication that European secularization may in fact be more accurately described as *unchurching*. The still widespread self-identification as Christian hints at 'an implicit, diffused and submerged Christian cultural identity', a phenomenon of 'belonging without believing' (Danièle Hervieu-Léger).⁷³

The repugnancy between party legacy and Christian rhetoric, but also the motivation of othering Muslims without explicitly negating the freedom of religion, results in a peculiarity of the Austrian case: in stark contrast to the American Christian Right discourse, the FPÖ usually denies that its Christian references possess religious meaning, as shown before with the example of the neighbour love controversy. Even the crucifix and cross, *the* Christian symbols, were portrayed in a similar fashion: asked how the FPÖ's programmatic advocacy of the separation of church and state was in accordance with the party's opposition to the removal of crosses from public school classrooms, Strache explained in 2014 that 'the cross is not the property of the Church, but it is the cultural, identity-establishing [*identitätsstiftend*, B.W.] property of the people'.⁷⁴ Already five years earlier, having drawn criticism for displaying a wooden cross while speaking at an anti-Muslim rally in Vienna, he had referred to the cross as a 'cultural bracket' rather than 'a theological symbol'.⁷⁵ This kind of reasoning illustrates the perspective on Christianity that the FPÖ has exhibited in recent years, and which sharply differs from the American Christian Right's: far from viewing it as a transcendental source of truth, Christianity is regarded here as one among several key influences that have, over centuries, shaped 'occidental culture'. This point of view was laid down in the 2011 party platform, whose official English version states that

⁷² Paul Zulehner, *Verbuntung. Kirchen im weltanschaulichen Pluralismus* [Colourification. Churches among the Pluralism of Worldviews] (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2011), p. 161–169, at 166.

⁷³ Casanova, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Television interview on 'Klartext', *ATV*, 27 October 2014.

⁷⁵ *Kurier*, 23 May 2009, p. 2. Shortly afterwards, Strache received his Catholic confirmation at the unusually late age of 39. The ceremony was administered by a notorious right-wing priest, Siegfried Lochner.

Europe was decisively shaped by Christianity, influenced by Judaism and other non-Christian religious communities, while humanism and the Enlightenment marked its continued fundamental development. We acknowledge the basic values this has created and the European view of the world, which we describe, in a broad sense, as cultural Christianity [*Kulturchristentum*, B.W.], and which is based on the separation of the church and the state.⁷⁶

It is along these lines that the FPÖ both in 2005 and 2010 utilized a depiction of Vienna's St. Stephen's Cathedral on campaign material. Defending the move, Strache referred to the sacral building as 'also a cultural symbol'.⁷⁷ The 2009 European elections campaign featured a poster reading '*Abendland in Christenhand*' ['The Occident (shall remain) in Christians' hands']. Five years later, neither the rhetoric nor the political goal behind it had changed: 'We want to preserve and develop the variety of European high cultures on the cultural basis of the Occident and values of Christianity. This also requires a halt on immigration to the EU and Austria.'⁷⁸

Images of the Other: Catholics, Latinos, and Islam

The FPÖ's nativism, ascribing fundamental incompatibility with the 'autochthonous' culture to certain groups of non-mainstream ethnic background, is paralleled by similar phenomena in the US. However, there are differences to be observed both in terms of reasoning and of the groups (mainly) affected. Generally speaking, immigration is presented as a threat in both countries based on a trinity of frames: immigrants as a security threat, as a threat to national identity and as a threat to liberal values and institutions. Whereas Christian allusions are unsurprising for the identitarian frame (Christianity as a cultural influence), their occurrence in connection with the cultural-political frame (Christianity as an influence on the hegemonic value system) seems more noteworthy considering the historical animosity between liberalism and Christianity. In the FPÖ's view, the Christian religion has undergone a process of enlightenment and is no longer at odds with the separation of church and state.⁷⁹ In the US,

⁷⁶ FPÖ, 'Austria first. Party Programme of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)', 2011, <https://www.fpoe.at/themen/parteiprogramm/parteiprogramm-englisch/>. As early as 1997, the predecessor to the 2011 platform had included a commitment to a 'Christianity that defends its values' and presented the FPÖ as an 'ally of the Christian Churches' in terms of conserving the 'spiritual foundations of the Occident' (FPÖ, 'Das Parteiprogramm der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs', revised edition, 2005, p. 7). These provisions were, however, considered highly controversial back then and stirred uproar from dogmatic party hacks, interestingly also including the young Heinz-Christian Strache.

⁷⁷ Interview in *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 14 October 2005, p. 2.

⁷⁸ FPÖ, 'Österreich denkt um' [Austria is Rethinking], European elections brochure, 2014.

⁷⁹ FPÖ, Party Programme, op. cit., p. 5.

the Catholic Church is now perceived by some right-wingers as an ally not only in the ‘culture war’ against liberals, but at the same time in the defence of civil liberties against Islam, which is portrayed as a rigorous, repressive political theology. This kind of argument is arguably more convincing in the US, where both liberal values and (Protestant) Christianity were part of the nation's founding ideology (see below). In Austria, where the Catholic Church fought liberalization over centuries (including the FPÖ's political ancestors since the late 19th century) and where the notion of the Christian *Abendland* was once used to fight secularization and Enlightenment, the current use of the same notion to (purportedly) defend these achievements appears remarkably incoherent and therefore tactically motivated.

In the light of the aforementioned demographical circumstances, it comes as no surprise that while Islam is discussed as a geopolitical and security issue in the US, the American immigration debate mainly revolves around another, much more numerous community: immigrants from Latin America, who made up an estimated 52.2 per cent of the total foreign born population living in the US between 2011 and 2013.⁸⁰ As a 2015 PEW study found, a little over two thirds (68 per cent) of the US population born outside the country identified as Christian.⁸¹ While the Turkish community in Austria is a rewarding target for othering campaigns infused with Christian rhetoric, religion is not as readily available as a tool for framing Latino immigrants to the US as fundamentally different and threatening. Their cultural otherness has to be construed as ethnic or value-based, or by drawing the dividing line between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ finer, not between religions, but confessions: Catholicism and Protestantism.⁸² Although the latter manoeuvre became uncommon with the increased status of Catholicism both within the Christian Right and the US in general, Ramos and Chamberlain hold that ‘anti-Catholic sentiments persist’ in 21st century America and that ‘anti-Catholicism’ constitutes ‘a significant dynamic in the anti-immigration movement’.⁸³ They specifically mention John Tanton's network of secular nativist (especially anti-Hispanic) organizations in this context, with the Federation for American Immigration Reform/FAIR as its mothership.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, ‘2011-2013 3-Year American Community Survey’, 2014.

⁸¹ PEW, *Religious Landscape*, op. cit., p. 73.

⁸² Catholics, with 47% in 2007, made up by far the biggest single confessional group among the American foreign-born population in the investigation period (PEW, *Religious Landscape*, op. cit., p. 74).

⁸³ Chamberlain/Ramos, op. cit., p. 21.

⁸⁴ While many conservative Evangelicals view Catholics as allies on ‘moral issues’ such as abortion and gay marriage, nativist voices have repeatedly accused the Catholic Church of taking an overly

Whereas anti-Catholic arguments could only scarcely be identified in the sources studied, the othering of Latinos with reference to alleged differences in values and cultural specificities beyond religion was found to be more widespread. However, confessionality plays a role here, too, insofar as thinkers like Samuel Huntington propagate an ‘American Creed’ that, although secular on the surface, is impregnated with Protestant rather than universally Christian morals. Worthen points out that many white evangelical leaders ‘still cherish that old libertarian creed’, revolving around values like hard work and individual responsibility, as ‘the political counterpart to an evangelical faith’ that is radically individualistic in its theology, too. Huntington, in his 2004 monograph *Who are we?*, warns against an irreversible change to American culture, should the US not manage to assimilate its immigrant population into the Protestant Anglo-Saxon lifestyles that have dominated American culture over centuries.⁸⁵ According to him, Latinos (particularly Mexicans) and Muslims have been ‘slower in approximating American norms’ than ‘other post-1965 groups’ of immigrants, which, Huntington suggests, results from what has been described as ‘a major gap ... between American and Mexican cultures’ and from the ‘hostility to American culture, secular and religious’ allegedly widespread among Muslims, respectively.⁸⁶ From a historical perspective, Casanova notes that the current depiction of Islam as ‘an essentially anti-modern, fundamentalist, illiberal and undemocratic religion and culture echoes the 19th century discourse on Catholicism’ in the US.⁸⁷ ‘Islam today as Catholicism before is often represented as “the other” and therefore as “un-American”.’⁸⁸ Contemporary resentment against Latino immigrants, in contrast, is no longer expressed with explicit reference to religion or confession, but rather portrays factors like deficient work ethic or collectivist leanings as indicators of un-Americanness, partly mirroring clichés that were still uttered in religious terms some decades ago.

Cultural Fundamentalism and Culture War(s)

Huntington-esque thinking and the FPÖ's agitation concur in their insistence on the preservation of a certain dominant culture, in the rejection of multiculturalism, the fear of cultural demise, of ‘natives’ (in the US: ‘non-Hispanic whites’) being outnumbered by

welcoming attitude towards immigrants (see *ibid.*, p. 22), a stance arguably owing to the history of Catholic immigrants' discrimination in the US and the large share of Catholics among Latin American immigrants.

⁸⁵ Huntington, *op. cit.*, chapter 4, particularly pp. 59–63.

⁸⁶ Huntington, *op. cit.*, pp. 188 and 360.

⁸⁷ Casanova, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

strangers imposing their own way of living, and, consequently, in their perception of immigration as a threat.⁸⁹ Both allege a lacking willingness of (certain groups of) immigrants to assimilate and suggest that certain cultural backgrounds put into question even the very ability to do so. Also beyond academic discourse, the American immigration debate mirrors cultural-fundamentalist patterns observable in Austria.⁹⁰ The EBI address the ‘cultural costs’ of immigration reform policies, expecting these to reshape, among other things, ‘America’s sovereignty, economy, spiritual and moral compass’.⁹¹ Similar patterns are not only displayed by single-issue anti-immigration groups, but also by classical Christian Right organizations. As far as theological reasoning goes, AICF president John Vinson qualifies the preservation of a nation’s ‘core identity based on religious belief, culture, ethnicity, and language’ as a Biblical right and predicts God’s wrath to ‘come down’ on nations subscribing to multiculturalism.⁹²

A look at the demand side of cultural-fundamentalist messages suggests they resonate particularly well with white Evangelicals in the US: in a 2006 PEW poll, 63 per cent of these were found to view immigrants as a ‘threat to U.S. customs and values’, as opposed to 48 per cent among all respondents and only 39 per cent among secularists.⁹³ However, there are also voices among the Christian Right who view Latinos as allies in the American ‘culture war’ – a clash not of civilizations, but of world views, in which the role of religion in public life is an important topic of contention. For conservatives who prioritise this cleavage, and the ‘moral issues’ linked to it, over nativism, and also give values priority over ethnicity in their assessment of immigrants’ compatibility with American society, Latinos are an important target constituency for the conservative values they are believed to hold.⁹⁴ From this perspective, (conservative Christian) immigrants are less of a threat to American culture than

⁸⁹ Indeed, the FPÖ positively references Huntington in its 2008 position paper on Islam (FPÖ, *Islam*, op. cit., p. 2).

⁹⁰ Cf. AICF president R. Goldborough, Cover letter for a poll on immigration, 1997-1, PFAW Collection, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, Box 6, Folder 7; FAIR, ‘Immigration Crisis Survey’, 1997, Box 40, Folder 8, p. 4; J. Farah, ‘Why I am a Minuteman’, 8 January 2005, Box 53, Folder 35.

⁹¹ EBI, op. cit.

⁹² Vinson, op. cit., p. 1.

⁹³ PEW Research Center, ‘Attitudes Toward Immigration: In the Pulpit and the Pew’, 2006, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2006/04/25/attitudes-toward-immigration-in-the-pulpit-and-the-pew>.

⁹⁴ For examples, refer to *Focus on the Family* president Jim Daly and others cited by M. Worthen, ‘Love Thy Stranger as Thyself’, *The New York Times*, 11 May 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/opinion/sunday/love-thy-immigrant-stranger-as-thyself.html?_r=0.

‘homegrown liberals’.⁹⁵ This view is rebuffed by nativist conservatives who, in contrast, advocate a primacy of ethnicity over religion, such as Thomas Fleming. In 2006, the then editor of the paleo-conservative *Chronicles* magazine, Catholic himself, wrote that Catholic immigrants from the South would by no means morally strengthen the US, holding they were quick to adopt ‘America's culture of consumerism and infanticide’, while not relinquishing ‘their own traditional style of violence.’⁹⁶

For Austria, Zulehner's research from 2010 identified a 40 per cent share of ‘peaceful cultural Christians’, in addition to the 29 per cent ‘militant’ ones mentioned before. The two groups differ in their assessment of Islam and of how Christian churches should react to the latter. Cultural Christianity, in Zulehner's understanding, is characterized by ‘severe concern about the future cultural identity of the country and, beyond that, Europe’, whereby Christianity is perceived as a ‘fundament of cultural identity, often in delineation [*in Abgrenzung*] from Islam’.⁹⁷ Unsurprisingly, the FPÖ has by far the largest share of militant cultural Christians among its voters, with 43 per cent. In comparison, weekly churchgoers came in at 30 per cent,⁹⁸ which appears to be indicative of the aforementioned phenomenon of ‘belonging without believing’.

Be(com)ing Austrian/American: Nations and Notions of Assimilability

From a cultural-fundamentalist angle, a person's cultural background appears as the key indicator of what could be dubbed ‘assimilability’. Insofar as nativists hardly ever bother to ascertain immigrants' actual religious beliefs and moral convictions on an individual basis, what actually inform judgement in this area are generalized assumptions about people hailing from certain cultural environments. It is these assumptions that lead nativists to view some migration flows more favourably than others. Tom Fleming, for instance, called on Mexicans in the US to fight ‘the spreading virus of Islam in our society’ and, by doing so, earn the right to live in North America.⁹⁹

Others, in their assessment of the main threat immigration presents, weight quantity (Latinos)

⁹⁵ Worthen, op. cit. Although the culture war is very much an American specificity, the viewpoint described here finds a parallel in Austria, where some conservatives perceive Muslims as natural partners in their fight against secularization and ‘moral relativism’.

⁹⁶ T. Fleming, ‘Violent Revolution’, *Chronicles*, 2006-7, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Zulehner, op. cit., p. 161 (my translation).

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 167f.

⁹⁹ T. Fleming, ‘El Gringo y El Mexicano’, *Chronicles*, 2006-11, p. 11.

higher than the quality of exceptional ‘otherness’ ascribed to Muslims. In contrast, people of Turkish, Chechen or (more recently) Syrian backgrounds are conveniently presented as both numerous and fundamentally different by the FPÖ and put under general suspicion of being unable and/or unprepared to blend in with the host society.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, the party has been making considerable efforts under Strache to co-opt people of Serbian origin for the confrontation with Islam. Perceived as fellow occidental Christians, Serbs are attributed both the capability and willingness to ‘integrate’, which, along with their numerousness, has made them the one immigrant community the FPÖ is actively courting as voters.¹⁰¹

Extensive concurrence notwithstanding, a number of peculiarities become apparent when contrasting the American and the Austrian cases, with different nationalist traditions emerging as a primary factor of influence. The frame of the ‘Christian Occident’, as employed by the FPÖ, merges culturalist and secularist traditions of thought, in line with the party's legacy of ethno-nationalism and anti-clericalism. The somewhat reminiscent notion of the US as a ‘Christian nation’, however, is decidedly anti-secular, mirroring the deep entanglement of American nationalism with religion from the former's very beginning, and gives testimony to the importance of religious rhetoric in American political discourse in general until the present.¹⁰² At the same time, the tradition of state nationalism in the US, with constitutionalism and a melting pot history as key sources of collective self-identification, makes the reference to liberal or ‘western’ values more crucial when it comes to framing (certain groups of) immigrants as culturally incompatible. According to historian Molly Worthen, the ‘basic fear’ in American nativism ‘has always been this: These foreigners don't respect our values and if we let them in, they will destroy us.’ It was ‘feared that newcomers would subvert democracy and sabotage citizens' claim to the American dream.’¹⁰³ This being said, it is worth reiterating that value-based nationalism à la Americaine does not come without a religious (Protestant) patina – and that, for many American nativists, the US is and should be built not only on a set of common core values, but a wider-ranging American ‘way of life’, ‘identity’ and ‘culture’,¹⁰⁴ which may also include an ethnic component.

¹⁰⁰ Schiedel, op. cit., p. 51; as an example, see Strache's interview in *Neue Ordnung*, No. 4, 2007, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ In order to establish and strengthen its ties with the Serbian community, the FPÖ in 2009 launched a ‘Christian-Freedomite Platform for a free Europe of Sovereign Peoples’.

¹⁰² See Ruth Murray Brown, *For a ‘Christian America’: A History of the Religious Right* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), particularly part II.

¹⁰³ Worthen, op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ American Immigration Control [sic], ‘Public Opinion Survey on U.S. Census Trends and

In Austria, the belated democracy, fear of subversion of democratic institutions and values has always taken a backseat to other worries. Here, earlier waves of anti-immigration sentiment were dominated by claims about the ‘racial’ inferiority of newcomers – particularly that of Jews from Eastern Europe – and about their supposed backwardness. The openly racist arguments were later largely discarded, but the ethno-chauvinist line of argument is still alive and well; and while in America, even nativist right-wingers are aware of the precariousness of ethnicity-based nativism in a country founded by immigrants just 230 years ago and attracting people from all over the world ever since, the FPÖ knows no such reservation. Regardless of Austria's own rich history of migration, the party has been campaigning since 1992 for a constitutional clause stating that Austria is ‘not an immigration country’.

7. Conclusions

This article set out to explore the use of Christian rhetoric in nativist discourse in Austria and in the US in the 21st century. It was shown that while Christian references abound in both countries, they are, in sum, more frequent, explicit and theologically informed among the actors studied for the American case, mirroring the relative importance of the Christian Right and of religion in general in the American public sphere. Qualifying standpoints as ‘unbiblical’ or resorting to Bible verses to make one's point is highly characteristic of the American (Christian Right) case, whereas the Austrian Freedom Party claims not to engage in theological debates. Although this is not always the case, Freedomite nativism indeed utilizes religion as essentially a marker of identity (both for the in- and out-group) rather than referring to it as a faith, placing belonging above belief and ‘Christendom above Christianity’.¹⁰⁵

This notwithstanding, religion was found to play a more important role in Austria when it comes to distinguish the Other from the Own. Also, the FPÖ has noticeably increased its Christian referencing under Heinz-Christian Strache's chairmanship, paralleling the emergence of Islam as, propagandistically, its main foe. The demographical peculiarities of

Immigrations Policy’, 1997, PFAW Collection, Box 6, Folder 7, p. 2; see also T. Fleming, *El Gringo*, op. cit., p. 10. For the role of ‘Anglo-Saxon, Protestant American’ ethnicity in (historical) American nativism, see E. Kaufmann, ‘American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Anglo-Saxon Ethnogenesis in the “Universal” Nation, 1776–1850’, *Journal of American Studies*, 33:3 (1999), pp. 437–457.

¹⁰⁵ Marzouki/McDonnell, op. cit., pp. 4 and 15.

immigration to Austria (with a larger share of immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries than the US) and the country's ethno-nationalist tradition were identified as important explanatory factors for the higher value of religion as an othering tool. Given the Christian backgrounds of immigrants, particularly Latino, to the US, the group most maligned by American nativists, it is not surprising that explicit calls to fend off newcomers in order to preserve the US' character as a Christian nation could hardly be found in the material studied. In contrast, the FPÖ co-opts people with Serbian background for the defence of the Christian *Abendland* against Islam. Meanwhile, in the US, the specificity of the 'culture war' leads some right-wingers to welcome Latinos as allies in the struggle for conservative values against liberals and secularists, respectively. The largely unanimous rejection of Muslims by Austrian nativists is in accordance with the finding that people perceived as different in terms of religious confession *and* ethnicity face stronger rejection than those who share only one of these traits.¹⁰⁶

As for the different approaches to religion, it was shown that whereas Christian Rightists view Christianity as a source of truth from which guidelines for political behaviour (with nativist or non-nativist implications) can be derived, the FPÖ mainly feature it as a cultural marker, and secular American nativists largely stay away from religious language altogether, emphasizing socioeconomic, cultural and/or terrorist threats supposedly associated with immigration instead. The prominent role of value-based reasoning among nativists in the US and of ethno-cultural arguments in Austria has been interpreted as the consequence of different nationalist traditions and dissimilar immigrant demographics. In this context, it was also highlighted that religion can figure in nativist boundary definitions without being explicitly referenced. This was illustrated by the example of the American Creed, which defines Americanness in non-religious language, but via values heavily impregnated with Protestant morals. It is in this field of values where remnants of earlier, more explicit anti-Catholicism could be found; articulated, e.g., as the prejudice of Latino immigrants' nonconformity with a certain desirable work ethic.

Another difference of relevance between the two cases studied was identified in the different national traditions regarding church/state and religion/politics relations, respectively, a difference additionally reinforced by the FPÖ's pronounced heritage of anticlericalism versus

¹⁰⁶ Ben-Nun Bloom et al., op. cit., p. 218.

the Christian Right phenomenon in the US. This difference is reflected both in the lower occurrence of religious rhetoric in a strict sense (e.g. Bible quotes) in Freedomite discourse and in the topos of cultural Christianity that the party adopted in order to reconcile its liberal tradition with the use of religious references as an othering tool. Presenting Christianity as a pillar of occidental culture also proved beneficial in terms of appealing to the large target audience of Christian believers-not-believers.

The primary objective of this article was to investigate how Christian references are used to legitimize nativist policies in the light of Christian ethics (or egalitarian and inclusive interpretations thereof) that seem to advocate otherwise. A variety of *modi operandi* could be identified in that regard. Interestingly, neither of them explicitly negates the validity of equality or hospitality as abstract ideas. However, several echo the pivotal cultural-fundamentalist notion that fundamental differences exist between cultures and that those differences call for the spatial segregation of cultures on a global scale. This idea manifests itself very clearly in the (theological) argument that God does not want nations to mingle so they will preserve their specific identities. A less direct manoeuvre, particularly popular among both American and Austrian nativists, consists of reframing Christian values in order to legitimize their non- or restricted application to newcomers. Immigration is then countered not by defying, but in the very name of compassion and neighbourly love: welcoming and caring for strangers is framed as something that infringes on the interests of autochthonous people (and disadvantaged ones in particular), and that is therefore at odds rather than in line with Christian ethics. A precondition for this is the wholesale division of people not along their socio-economic positioning, but based on nationality or culture. In this non-universalist exegesis of Christian teachings, immigrants and autochthonous poor are played off against each other. Similarly, in terms of the structure of argument, immigration is sometimes opposed in defence of the equality notion, arguing that those who would deny equal treatment to others should not receive equal treatment themselves. This line of argument is certainly not cultural-fundamentalist *per se*, but can be qualified as such when the suspicion is sweepingly projected onto (certain groups of) immigrants, based on the framing of equality as a Christian or exclusively 'Western' notion.

Other argumentative paths nativists were found to pursue in order to relieve their politics of restrictions imposed by Christian ethics include ethical individualization and the introduction of different classes of immigrants. The former holds that certain imperatives, like that of

hospitality, are not applicable to states, but to individuals only, effectively depoliticizing immigration in the process. The latter alleges that only specific kinds of strangers have to be treated hospitably by Christians (cultural or actually devout). While some of the classifications introduced in this respect are based, or professed to be based at least, on immigrants' actual behaviour (those who abide by the law and those who do not), others qualify certain groups as unwelcome a priori. These latter classifications follow a cultural-fundamentalist pattern, singling out non-Christians or people hailing from particular cultural backgrounds as culturally incompatible, as unwilling and/or unable to assimilate. Religion fulfils a variety of functions in the process of ascribing incompatibility. Some nativists view it as immediate (and sufficient) evidence, some as one among several factors of influence on the formation of incompatible value systems, or as an indicator of an ethno-cultural otherness that cannot be reconciled with the host society's cultural mainstream. The fact that the alleged otherness is fundamental and, at least by tendency, imagined as innate – although attributed to cultural background, not genes – hints at a biologist undercurrent to cultural fundamentalist discourse.

As has been stressed here from the outset, Christian references (and religion in general) can serve very diverse purposes. They can be deployed in an inclusive way by affirming the fundamental equality of all human beings, by invoking universal compassion and hospitality, or, at least, by appealing to inner-religious solidarity. On the other hand, they can serve exclusionary agendas by making a certain religion, denomination or religiously impregnated culture or creed a criterion of belonging and qualifying for hospitable treatment. Considering both this ambivalence and the evident societal and political relevance, maybe even renaissance, of religion on a global scale today, both politicians and religious figures concerned about peaceful coexistence in contemporary diverse societies are called upon to counter religiously informed rhetoric promoting hostility and discrimination. Also, it seems vital that states adopt and develop sound and timely religion policies – including those subscribing to secularism and historically (mis)interpreting the latter as the imperative to plainly disregard religious matters altogether.

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