

# Hush, Horror and High Spirits

**In 2005, the Catholic Church shot up the media ranks – but what remains after the falling star?**

There are two poles of communication between the Roman Curia and the German Christian community, wrote Alexander Kissler in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “insulted reticence and insulting uproar”. When it comes to volume, the leading German media reflect this kind of “discussion” on the Catholic Church over the past three years.

**Graph 1** demonstrates: Journalists gave next to no attention to the Catholic Church and other religious communities in the past years. But when they covered it, they mainly censured (graph 2): Assessments were negative in most months of the **Media Tenor** analysis. Yet for the Catholic Church, the year 2005 was an exception: Two popes and one World Youth Day increased coverage to a level that bordered on rapture, compared to the previously demonstrated dispassion. However, to what extent did the media seriously discuss Christian values? What is their 2006 follow-up on reconciliation and ecumenism? Does such a discussion even take place? And to what extent are the issues and values of other churches and religions reflected in the media and public opinion? In the past three years, the share of media coverage on religious communities drifted

between three to six percent of overall reporting on societal institutions. The share of total coverage, for example in the major German television news, is much lower still. This is despite the fact that the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches have about 53 million members – which is a share of 60% of the total population. This certainly needs to be put into perspective: The German Religious Sciences Media and Information Service (Remid) underlines the fact that the two big Christian churches count all of those baptized as members. In fact, surveys conducted especially on the Protestant side, show that only a relatively small share of its members was actually active in their congregations. Still, given the relationship between members and amount of media coverage, it is hard to believe that the majority of Christians would feel adequately informed.

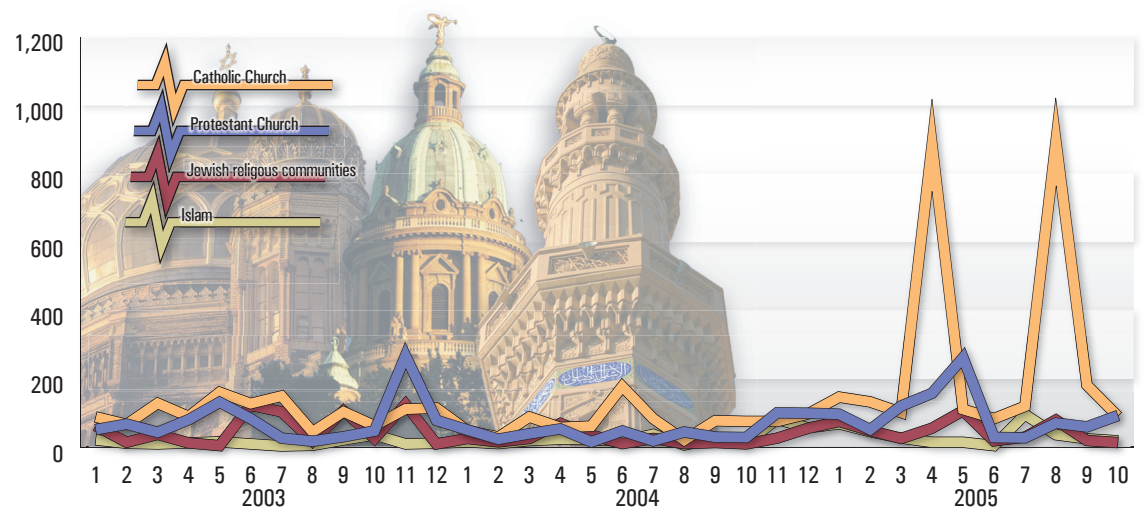
This is also true for other religious communities. The media hardly recognized approximately 3.3 million Muslims, one million Orthodox Christians and 200.000 people of Jewish faith when it came to their religion. Barley four percent of coverage on societal organizations dealt with these religious communities.

**No room for community life**

Naturally, the coverage on the Catholic Church peaked in the months of April and August 2005. However, the death of John Paul II, the election of Benedict XVI and his appearance on the World

**1 Media presence of religious communities January 2003 – October 2005**

Not even the death of John Paul II, the election of Benedict XVI and his appearance on the World Youth Day in Cologne lead into a more continuous media discussion on church activities.

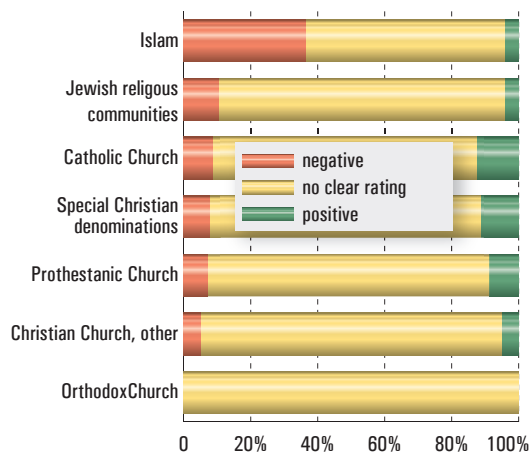


Number of passages (at least 5 lines/seconds)

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2003 – 10/31/2005

Basis: a total of 9,898 passages about religious communities

## 2 Media assessment of religious communities 01/03 – 10/05



Balance of positive and negative assessments

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2003 – 10/31/2005

Basis: a total of 9,898 passages  
about religious communities

Youth Day in Cologne did not lead into a more continuous media discussion on church activities. After the events had lost their most immediate news value, coverage fell on the average level of the past three years. The big issues that the popular churches are raising in their quest for a place in a secular society, were neither addressed adequately in reports on the Catholic nor on the Protestant Church (see **graph 3**). Leading German

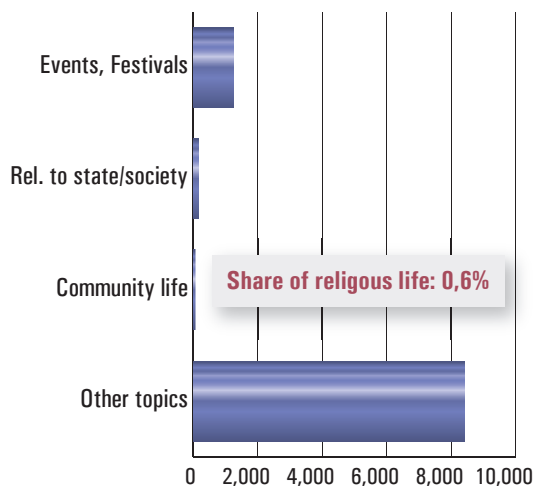
media hardly addressed the relationship between churches and the state, or the relationship between the two popular churches. What is worse: Believers

**Low coverage, but negative rating: The media hardly recognized approximately 3.3 million Muslims, one million Orthodox Christians and 200.000 people of Jewish faith when it came to their religion.**

feel ignored when there is no coverage of daily activities in their congregations, while agnostics, atheists and members of other religious communities are left unenlightened. After all, they don't know anything about one another, and journalists are largely responsible when they take a selective look at the world that favors their own worldview. But public relations officials of the churches also contribute to the dilemma by

putting up with this lack of coverage. In the end, the critics keep the upper hand. The quarrelsome Hans Küng, mainly present in the weekly Spiegel, has an easier time placing his criticism than the PR professionals of the Vatican. But without a continuous media debate, the struggle around old and new values, as well as the endeavor to present an alternative sense of community in times of global competition, remain invisible.

## 3 Selected topics in coverage on churches



Share of passages on the each topic

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2003 – 10/31/2005

Basis: a total of 9,898 passages  
about religious communities

An October 2005 poll by the German opinion research institute Allensbach suggested that Christians sleep better than non-Christians do, because they are less troubled by stress. This announcement appeared to be newsworthy to many journalists. However, the reasons for such a healthy attitude towards life remain unclear to the readers and viewers of German media. sm

### Basis:

**Media:** Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine, Süddeutsche, Focus, Spiegel, ARD Tagesschau and Tagesthemen, ZDF heute and heute Journal, RTL Aktuell, Sat.1 News, ProSieben News, Deutsche Welle TV News German and English

**Timeline:** 01/01/2003 – 10/31/2005

**Analysis:** All statements about religious communities in this media, if this communities were mentioned in at least 5 lines/seconds

**Other Sources:** Religionswissenschaftlicher Medien- und Informationsdienst