

# Orientation



Since Jürgen Habermas proclaimed a “new obscurity” in 1985, social and societal complexities have only increased. People and organisations alike face challenges in navigating evermore fragmented environments dominated by uncertainty. As a consequence of this continued trajectory, commonly accepted norms and value systems are losing meaning, while pluralisation and individualisation emerge as guiding structures for orientation and purpose-finding.

Yet, even plural and individualistic societies depend on norms and orientation to facilitate co-existence, perhaps especially so. Furthermore, people need orientation as individuals and turn to norms in search of safety and security. This has given rise to new normative discourses and offerings in recent years: On a societal level, “ethics” and “European values” have become a fervently and publicly discussed topic, revealing a quest for community spirit, accountability and social identity. We can see this quest reflected in the questioning of what underpins social cohesion, and what constitutes a cohesive value system. Politics, science, culture, education and the media – subsystems of society – equally seek orientation through normative parameters to follow. On an individual level, influencers, charismatic religious preachers and public figures have taken over the mantle of providing guidance and goals, not least accelerated by social media. These figures and platforms not only herald new and alternative norms and models for orientation, they also – or predominantly – shepherd a return to traditional views and roles rooted in allegedly proven political and religious concepts. They promise an antidote to the disorientation and perceived lack of social values in people’s personal and public life. Often, these solutions are presented as a rebellious act and protest against new, liberal norms such as tolerance and diversity.

Traditionally, religion serves as a central guidepost for meaning and orientation – both on a personal and societal level. The Bible and other scriptures provide guidance for navigating uncertainties and change, and for finding one's place in the world. Religious traditions and practices offer grounding for orientation and (re)alignment with a higher purpose. What do these guideposts look like today? New religious movements offer alternative ways for meaning-finding, whereas established Churches struggle to adapt in a pluralistic society. Additionally and compounding, the digital flood of information obscures reliable (re)sources for orientation and encourages scepticism towards traditional authorities of knowledge.

The forthcoming edition of Limina thus puts orientation into focus and aims to highlight possibilities and challenges in navigating a rapidly changing world.

### Suggested questions

- What role do religions and faith communities play for individuals, as well as politics, judiciary, pedagogy, the media and society at large in their search for orientation and meaning? Do traditional religious institutions and their semantics still serve as relevant guides for orientation? How can a theological reflection on the concept of orientation contribute towards new impulses for the Church and for society?
- What underpins the need for orientation and what are we actually searching for? How has this changed in the context of current processes of transformation?
- What are the differences and what is the common ground between religious guidance for finding meaning and orientation, and secular ethical norms? In what way do they encourage or demand commitment?
- What interpretations of 'orientation' can be gleaned from the Bible? How is this communicated in religious practices? What role do narratives play in creating meaning during times of social insecurity?
- How do Churches, faith communities and theology bridge the tension between autonomy and commitment in the search for orientation and norms?

- What are the challenges arising from the flood of information and the dissemination of fake news for traditional and modern offerings for orientation?
- Do concepts such as resonance or quality of life open up new perspectives for (dis)orientation in a complex world?
- Which explicit and implicit norms and systems for orientation have emerged in recent years? What gave rise to them and what are they based in? How and what do they effect/affect?
- What underlies and how can we understand the return to traditional normative concepts (e. g. traditionalist or fundamentalist religion, traditional gender roles, nationalism and marriage) in the search for orientation?

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