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## The Institute of St. Justin de Jacobis: a Catechumenate Open Also for Persons Coming from Islamic Countries

Province of Austria

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**The Institute of St. Justin de Jacobis – a Catechumenate  
open also for persons coming from Islamic countries**

*Province of Austria, C.M.*

Five years ago we were encouraged by the former Viennese Archbishop Cardinal König not to send foreign persons away who ask to become Christians. From the very beginning we chose the way of the catechumenate that was required for adults by Vatican Council II. The first persons who were instructed received regular guidance for about four years.

A special experience of that time was the contact with a certain group from Anatolia in Turkey, the so-called Alevites. They should not be confused with the Alawites of Syria, who are very different.

We found out that the Alevites are much closer to Christians than to Moslems due to their customs and their style of life.

The independence of their community can be seen, for instance, from the fact that they do not accept the five Columns of Islam, they reject the Sharia, they have no mosques, no five daily prayers, they have no Ramadan, no separation of men and women, no prohibition of alcohol, etc.

On the contrary, the one group that is called Kizilbas, which means 'Red Heads', stresses Christian ideals.

The leader of their prayer is a Dede –the senior, meaning the presbyter– who is the shepherd of his community at the same time. The religious service takes place in private houses, and there they have the office of doorkeepers. There is no ritual cleansing of hands and feet before the beginning of the prayer but the question about fraternal love. During the service the Dede blesses bread and puts a little piece of it on the tongue of each of the participants.

They do not know the meaning of that ceremony and neither do they know why the Dede then blesses a cup of wine and hands it to each one with the old Turkish word 'dem' which means 'blood'. Nobody knows whose blood that is supposed to be.

Alevites are generally monogamous, and divorce is considered to be shameful. They only fast for three days –similar to a custom of the Syrian Christians who have their Ninive fasting up until today. In many houses of Alevites one can find pictures of Our Lady. These are just a few examples of their customs.

Until recently those people were simply called 'Moslems' –and they number more than one quarter of the whole Turkish population! The same percentage is found among Turks in Central Europe. Specifically those people come to church and ask for baptism, but many priests are afraid to be involved with them. We should be aware that within the last 6 years approximately 60.000 of these persons became Jehova's Witnesses.

This is why we founded this 'Institute St. Justin'. He is the patron because we started this work on his feast day. Presently two small communities in Graz and Linz are growing. They have regular masses in the Turkish language. Hopefully we will receive some new candidates for the catechumenate in September.