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WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE "LUCKMANN 1960"? SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION IN GERMANY, AUSTRIA, AND SWITZERLAND

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1. Introduction

To write about a specific field of sociology within the German-speaking countries immediately raises the question of why to restrict the report to countries that share a common language. Especially in a situation in which "European" perspectives are stressed and at least survey research has long transcended national boundaries, the focus might as well be on European countries in general.

But, one might argue, even a growing process of interchange between sociologists of different European nations, that has led to the foundation of a European Sociological Association a few years ago, probably won't create a homogeneous "European" sociology. And also the statistical efforts to "measure" religiosity in different European countries, that – by means of using the same mathematical procedures and referring to the same data bases – evoke the impression of a certain homogeneity, don't say too much about common or divergent theoretical approaches.

In spite of this specific 'international' type of research and despite different efforts towards a Europeanization of sociology there is some evidence that there are indeed national or cultural traditions – characteristic "universes of discourse" – within the field of sociology of religion. This is obvious in regard to classical sociological thought, represented by Max Weber and Georg Simmel in Germany or by Émile Durkheim in France. But the question remains of how much these 'national' traditions still influence recent works in the field of sociology of religion. The attempt, made in this journal, to find out about current trends within sociology of religion in several European countries, might help answering the question regarding specific 'national' profiles on the one side and similarities between different European sociologies in their way of approaching religion on the other side.

In the following I will make an attempt to work out some trends in the sociology of religion in Germany, Austria and Switzerland since 1960: a year

that scholars in this field remember well because of Thomas Luckmann's famous attack on the then current trends in sociology of religion. I will deal with some important theoretical and empirical studies that have been published since then and I will try to work out the main theories, fields of research and methodical ways of approaching religion. This report certainly cannot give a 'complete' overview of this field (see also Seyfarth, 1980; Tyrell, 1996; Ebertz, 1997), and attempts like this always bear the danger of forgetting some publications that later come to mind as "really important". So all I can do is to sketch some of the main lines in sociology of religion in the German-speaking countries.

2. The impact of the founding fathers of sociology

2.1 Research on the "classics"

It would take a separate article to deal profoundly with the work done about the writings of Max Weber and Georg Simmel, the "founding fathers" of German sociology.

There have been a new paperback edition of Weber's writings (Weber, 1988), a new edition with the different versions of Weber's famous article on the "Protestant Ethics" (Lichtblau/Weiß, 1993) and several introductions to Weber's work, especially to the "Protestant Ethics" (Guttandin, 1998).

And there has been and still is a great amount of sociological literature on both of these "classics". In the case of Max Weber, his sociology of religion of course was often in the center of these studies, not only done by sociologists (Seyfarth/Sprondel, 1973; Schluchter, 1991; Tyrell, 1990; 1991; 1992; 1993; Guttandin, 1998), but also by historians (Mommsen, 1974; Gneuss/Kocka, 1988) and in interdisciplinary scholarly efforts (Schluchter, 1987; 1988). Many of these studies deal with the "Protestant Ethics" (Tyrell, 1990; 1993) and with the line in Weber's work that goes from there to his studies about the economic ethos of the different world religions (Schluchter, 1991); there are several monographies, articles and edited volumes about newer insights in the relationship of Protestantism and capitalism, from a sociological (Seyfarth/ Sprondel, 1973) as well as from a historical point of view (Gneuss/Kocka, 1988); about the concept of "life conduct" inherent in Weber's work (Schluchter 1991) and about the concept of "rationality" – which is central for Weber's writings – and its implications for the anticipated future of religion (Drehsen, 1975; Weiß, 1975; Tyrell, 1993). Several authors, like Hahn (1974) and Tenbruck (1971) refer to Weber's notion of a secularization process, whereas Dux (1971)

has reconstructed Weber's theory explicitly as a *theory* of secularization (see Seyfarth, 1980).

Georg Simmel's sociology of culture has been quite prominent among German sociologists for a long time, and a new complete edition of his work has been edited (Rammstedt 1989 ff.). But Simmel's work on religion has been only recently thoroughly dealt with (Krech, 1998; see also Helle/Nieder, 1997). Krech claims in his book that – despite former judgements on the lack of a consistent theory on religion in Simmel's work – there *is* indeed such a consistent theory, even if it remains implicit in Simmel's writings.

Compared to the literature on Weber's work, there has been much less work on Émile Durkheim's sociology of religion, one of the early exceptions being René König's work (König, 1962), one of the few recent ones being Firsching's study on 'morality and society' (Firsching, 1994). The author is not only dealing with Durkheim's work itself, but more generally with the discourse on morality and society coming up in the last third of the 19th century. This discourse, that perceived itself as "sociological", indicated – as Firsching shows – a break in occidental reasoning in response to the increasing secularization of knowledge. Firsching also points out the different answers to this situation given by Durkheim and Weber and their lasting influence on French and German sociology. Hans-Peter Müller (1986; 1992), also touching the question of religion in Durkheim's theory, focusses on the relationship between morality and individualism in Durkheim's work, pointing out similarities between Durkheim and Weber, especially regarding the idea of profession, the central position of professional groups, and the role of professional ethics in both theories.

The edited volume "Religionssoziologie um 1900" (Krech/Tyrell, 1995) also deals with the situation at the turn of the century, which can be considered the cradle of sociology of religion as well as of sociology in general. Sociology of religion – in the beginning – was a European undertaking, although with divergent national (French and German) semantics. But in a historical perspective the editors of this volume also stress the *discontinuity* between the classical sociology of religion of Weber and Durkheim on the one side, and the 'sociological' thought of the 19th century including its "Religionskritik" as represented by Comte and Marx (Tyrell, 1995) on the other side.

Hans Joas (1995; 1999) has introduced the perspective of American pragmatism to the German field of sociology of religion. In his book "Die Entstehung der Werte" he (Joas, 1997) deals with classical as well as with modern social theory, focussing on the genesis of values and value commitment. His conclusion, derived from the comparative readings of Nietzsche, James,

Durkheim, Simmel, Scheler, Dewey, Taylor, and postmodern theory, is that values develop through experiences of self-development and self-transcendence.

2.2 *Weberian perspectives in current sociology of religion: the phenomenon of charisma*

The "classics" are relevant not only because many scholars have been constantly interpreting their work but also because some of their concepts and theories still prove valid for current sociological attempts to understand religious (or pseudo-religious) phenomena. This is especially true for the concept of "charisma", developed by Max Weber in his book "Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft" (Weber 1976). Starting with the work of Friedrich Tenbruck (1975) the new discussion of charisma in Germany is characterized by the attempt not to restrict charisma to the field of authority and charismatic leadership. Charisma is then conceived as one basic element of social life and social order in general, another basic element being everyday life (Alltag) which is seen as the very opposite of charisma (see Gebhardt, 1993, 4). Several studies discuss Weber's concept of charisma taking it as a theoretical framework for the analysis of religious and political phenomena. A systematic interpretation of Weber's charisma-concept aiming at a universal theory of charisma has been delivered by Wolfgang Schluchter (Schluchter, 1979, 1991, 535 ff.). Schluchter stresses that Weber's main theoretical interest was on the process of routinization (Veralltäglichung) of "pure charisma". His suggestion is to differentiate between the two meanings of this term: the more structural aspect of "Veralltäglichung" (routinization) and the more evolutionary aspect of "Versachlichung" (rationalization).

In his study on 'charisma as a way of life' (Charisma als Lebensform) Winfried Gebhardt (1994) also refers to Weber's theory of the routinization, rationalization and institutionalization of charisma. In three cases-studies (Christian monasticism, Hutterische Brüder, Monte Verità) he develops his notion of charisma as a way of life. His thesis is that groups like these try to maintain the original content and "purity" of charisma by transforming charisma into a way of life and thereby forcing on the institutions around them a reflection on their spiritual and cultural foundations and forms of social order. Therefore they can be interpreted as 'systems for preventing system-building' (Gebhardt, 1994, 230). Beyond the analysis of concrete groups Gebhardt's study is an attempt to grasp the function of different forms of "alternative life" for the stability and legitimacy of social order in general.

Hans-Georg Soeffner uses the concept of "charisma" to analyze the style of "punk". Punk is characterized by the self-charismatization of a group and its

life-style without following a charismatic leader. Soeffner interpretes this phenomenon as an attempt to sacralize everyday life and puts it in the context of the community-oriented ritualism of religous groups.

Constans Seyfarth (1979) even goes beyond that by claiming that the concept of charisma is not restricted to the analysis of charismatic movements but is useful for the general understanding of social order. Charisma, in his view, is in different ways built into everyday life, and everyday life itself can only be understood as a synthesis of "Außeralltäglichkeit" and "Alltäglichkeit", charisma and routine.

From this point of view charisma is a productive force also in modern life, but not necessarily as a personal, but rather as a depersonalized charisma. Günther Roth (1987) and Stefan Breuer (1994) for example hint to the 'charisma of reason' (Charisma der Vernunft) which – as they stress – did not end with the French revolution but found its continuity in the Marxist-Leninist movement.

Most recently Ulrich Oevermann (1995) has developed what he calls a 'model of the structure of religiosity'. By stressing the temporal dimensions of charisma, Oevermann conceives charisma as a process consisting of (a) an initial crisis, (b) that is pointed out (or suggested) by a charismatic figure, (c) the charismatic's proposal for the solution of this crisis, (d) the affirmation of the charismatic's credibility by concrete followers, and (e) the permanent practical proving (Bewährung) of his proposal. This process of "proving" goes along with the routinization of crisis solution.

Oevermann claims an analogy between this process and the process of crisis, problem-solving proposals and practical proving as a basic process in social life. Beyond this he considers the never-ending necessity of "proving" (Bewährung) as the *structural* moment of religiosity which survives and – even more – whose dynamic becomes radicalized in the process of secularization. While the substantial contents of religion as well as the traditional religious answers to the problem of proving (Bewährungsproblem) continually fade away in the course of secularization, what remains are individuals that have to create their personal myth of proving (Bewährungsmythos) by reconstructing their own biographies.

The different analyses of charisma not only show that charisma remains an important aspect of social life in modernity, and that the rationalization of charisma is an ongoing process, but they also indicate structural similarities and – to use a Durkheimian term – functional equivalents between religious and political phenomena or "religious" and "secular" contexts. While it always seemed easier (or maybe: more tempting) for French sociology of religion to explicitly compare religious, political and social-psychological phenomena

because of the functional perspective introduced by Émile Durkheim, the discussion about charisma shows that this might work in the German tradition via the concept of charisma.[1] While the fields of sociology of religion and political sociology at the moment are still more or less separated,[2] the concept of charisma might become a theoretical tool to integrate these perspectives.

While the studies above analyze charisma as a basic element of social life and deal with the process of the routinization of charisma, Wolfgang Lipp's study on stigma and charisma (Lipp, 1985) focusses on the *genesis* of charisma. Coming from the point of view of sociology of deviancy, Lipp's main thesis is, that there is a process of transformation from stigma into charisma. This means that stigmatized persons, burdened with – what he calls – 'social guilt', demonstratively agree to these stigmata and, by doing that, change their meaning. This process of self-stigmatization has, as the author puts it, a high potential for transformation. Stigmata can be transformed into attributes that confront a society with new possibilities of social-moral order, and – within this process – can be increasingly valued positively and finally become "charismatized".

Michael N. Ebertz (1987; 1993) has used this argument and applied it to the historic example of the charismatic Jesus movement. From his point of view the 'Jesuan charisma of self-stigmatization' could be considered the historic prototype of this kind of charismatic phenomena.

Even if Lipp's book which claims to present a general theory of the genesis of charisma, necessarily provokes critical questions regarding its actual generalizability (e. g.: Does every stigma equate 'social guilt'?; see Zingerle, 1994, 254), this perspective has been important in its way of referring to Weber's theory transcending it in its theoretical and empirical approach as well.

2.3 Analyzing fundamentalism from a Weberian perspective

From a different perspective Martin Riesebrodt in his book on 'fundamentalism as a patriarchal protest movement' (Riesebrodt, 1990; 1996) has used a Weberian approach to analyze religious fundamentalism as a religious response to modernity.

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1 Tyrell, 1992, 197 ff.; 1995, 100 f.), for example, explicitly equates Weber's concept of charisma with Durkheim's concept of "collective effervescence".

2 One exception is Michael Ley's (1993) analysis of German fascism as a form of political religion.

In a comparative perspective Riesebrodt analyzes Christian fundamentalism in the United States in the beginning of the 20th century and Shi'ite fundamentalism in Iran during the sixties and seventies. Despite many differences Riesebrodt claims that both movements – as urban protest movements – have several features in common. Both can be described as forms of radical traditionalism. The term "tradition" – in line with Max Weber – aims at specifically structured social relationships and ethical regulations of life conduct, against whose transformation the protest is directed (Riesebrodt, 1990, 216). It is primarily patriarchal structures that fundamentalism tries to maintain or regain. Therefore radical traditionalism in its very core is radical patriarchalism, and its radicalization has been caused by the pressure of legitimacy under which the traditional way of life has come in the course of this transformation.

In the center of fundamental social critique lies what is considered the 'moral decay' of society, especially the changing family structures and the changing role of women. But, even if fundamentalism mainly focusses on the breakdown of patriarchal structures and morality in primary social relations, the same pattern can be found in its critique of politics and economy. For this reason Riesebrodt considers the conflict between fundamentalism and modernity as a confrontation between two different principles of societal organization. The fundamentalist ideas about a legitimate order are connected to patriarchal structures and values, against whose erosion and transformation into rationalized and depersonalized structures the protest is directed. Therefore – in Riesebrodt's view – fundamentalism must be seen as a response to an epochal process that transforms the foundations of interpersonal relationships in all social sectors.

Riesebrodt's book must be considered in several respects an important sociological attempt in Weber's footsteps: in its comparative perspective as well as in its theoretical analysis of fundamentalist movements, their relationships to processes of modernization and their disruptive consequences for traditional social relations and forms of life conduct.

2.4 *Religion, Self Control, and Modern Individuality: Alois Hahn's Sociology of Confession*

Inspired by Max Weber's idea, that in the course of religious evolution the *ritual* control of action loses significance, whereas forms of *ethical* control of action become more important, Alois Hahn (1982; Hahn/Willems, 1993) analyzes the role of confession as a social institution within this process. He argues within the theoretical framework as outlined by Max Weber, but questions Weber's argument, that the abolition of the institution of confession in the Puritan movement was necessary to provoke the unique systematic regle-

mentation of ethical life conduct, whereas – in Weber's view – the chance to repeatedly confess one's sins, as granted in the catholic church, hindered this development. Referring to his studies about the Counter-Reformation, Hahn rejects this part of Weber's argument: Also within the Counter-Reformation falling back into a sinful life after confession caused the anxiety of eternal damnation and therefore could as well provoke systematic self-control. Analyzing the changes of confession as an institution throughout history, Hahn shows, how this institution changes its meaning from an instrument of relief to a means of systematic self-reflection.

But, Hahn's studies not only aim at proving the scope of Weber's arguments. He is especially interested in the cultural relevance of confessions – in churches, political groups, in psychotherapy or autobiographies – as systematic forms of self-reflection and – in this sense – as important elements in the civilization process.

3. "Modern Classics": Luhmann and Luckmann

Besides Simmel and Weber Niklas Luhmann (1972; 1977; 1987; 1996; 1997) and Thomas Luckmann (1960; 1985; 1991; 1998) can almost be considered "modern classics" in the field of sociology of religion. Despite great differences in their theoretical systems both share certain characteristics.

3.1 Thomas Luckmann

Thomas Luckmann, as is widely known, claims an anthropological basis for religion, since he considers the transcending of the biological nature by the development of world views (Weltansichten) an inherently religious process. The process of transcendence itself is deeply rooted in the social structure of our experience (Luckmann, 1985; 1991): Experience in itself would be impossible without references that go beyond the "here and now" of the individual person, without references to the past as well as to social contexts. While in every moment we necessarily experience this kind of "small range" transcendencies (*kleine Transzendenzen*), this is of even more importance in our encounters with other people. Though we might be in the most intimate relationship with another one, the other person and the other body mark a boundary and by this indicate what Luckmann calls "middle range" transcendencies (*mittlere Transzendenzen*). This second type of transcendency directly refers to the theory of Husserl (1950: 138 ff.). Finally, there is a third type of transcendence, the "*grand transcendencies*" that we become aware of through sleeping, dreaming

and hallucinating. These examples illustrate what one might call the structural origin of religion in experience.

In spite of Luckmann claiming an anthropological basis of religion, it would be an over-simplification to say that in his theory religion could never die: Even if this kind of basic 'religion' per definition cannot fade away, religion in its institutionalized social forms definitely can. Those social forms of religion come into play when 'transcendencies' become socially organized (e. g. in churches), theorized and canonized (in theologies and dogmas). And, of course, they can melt away and with them everything that we usually look upon as religion. What – from Luckmann's perspective – must stay, is that human beings transcend their biological existence by developing world views.

Luckmann's theory became prominent not only because of this anthropological foundation of religion, but also through his contribution to the theory of secularization. In his essay "Invisible religion" (Luckmann, 1991), which was first published in English in 1967 and only in 1991 in German, Luckmann sees a new social form of religion emerging: a privatized and individualized form of religion, largely independent from the official models represented by the churches, referring in its contents to the individual and the private sphere – to the family, sexuality, social mobility, and autonomy – and stabilizing with personal relationships these 'subjective systems of ultimate meaning'.

This essay as well as Luckmann's "state of the art"-report on sociology of religion already published in 1960 (Luckmann, 1960) became very influential in German sociology of religion. In both publications Luckmann criticized that the research on religion in Germany had become extremely narrow and church-oriented, equating religion immediately with the institutional form of the church. He further criticized that in methodological terms the current research of his time mainly focussed on "measuring" the religious "attitudes" of respondents by presenting predefined items to them, which again defined religiosity in terms of the church. Luckmann's criticism became influential not only because it provoked new attempts to find religiosity outside the churches (see Knoblauch, 1997), but it also stimulated new methodological efforts to grasp subjective religiosity as well as systems of meaning and ultimate significance besides the official versions represented by the churches. One of the most recent undertaking in this direction is the research on moral communication in everyday life (Luckmann, 1998).

Luckmann also contributed to the discussion on secularization inasmuch as he brought the term of the "privatization" of religion into this debate. This term was relativized a few years ago by José Casanova as being only one path that religion can take in the modern world (Casanova, 1994) next to the other

possible option of "going public". Franz-Xaver Kaufmann's (1989) sociology of Christianity also hints to the cultural and institutional influences of Christianity that transcend private beliefs. Kaufmann (1989, 100) speaks of "implicit Christianity" that became materialized in the structure of the welfare state. Just recently Friedrich Fürstenberg (1999) confirmed Casanova's and Kaufmann's view by hinting to religious manifestations outside the private sphere that – in his view – indicate the emergence of a "social religion".

But Luckmann also attracted attention (and provoked criticisms) in this debate by differentiating between three different levels of secularization. He only agreed to the diagnosis of the social structure being secularized while he rejected the idea of the secularization of the individual as well as of society (in the Durkheimian sense) as one of the myths of modern society (Luckmann, 1980). Here again, his anthropologically founded sociology of knowledge came into play: In this view neither can there be human beings without a transcending of their biological existence by constructing world views, nor can there be a society without a "socializing" of its members. But, of course, this did not at all imply that these world views were considered 'religious' in a substantial way. Nevertheless, Luckmann's theory provoked a lot of research trying to prove or disprove his assumptions.

3.2 Niklas Luhmann

Coming from the very different point of view of systems theory, Niklas Luhmann nevertheless shares some ideas with Thomas Luckmann. One commonality is the common background of functional theory, the other one is the reference to Husserl's concept of "Appräsentation" that Luhmann uses in a generalized way (Luhmann, 1977, 22, FN 28). In Luhmann's theory religion is basically connected with the very structure of observation and with the concept of meaning (*Sinn*) as defined by him. Observation necessarily has to distinguish in order to be able to mark something. Therefore meaning is the simultaneous presentation of the real and the possible, placing everything that is intentionally referred to, in the horizon of other possibilities (Luhmann, 1977, 21). In the theoretical language of systems theory this can also be explained as the relationship of systems and their environments.

What is now *"appresented"* may be reintroduced later by *representation* and thus come into the focus of attention, but this is again only possible in the context of further appresentations. Structure-building (= observation) necessarily presupposes selectivity and contingency. Representation always implies reduction and the risk of loss. The full range of appresentations can never be captured.

Religion in Luhmann's perspective is anchored exactly in this necessary contingency. It is what he calls the reference problem (Bezugsproblem) of religion. Religion compensates for the selectivity of structure-building. Its function for the social system is to transform the indetermined and indeterminable world (of countless appresentations) into a determined one. Religion performs this function in a process of symbolization (Chiffrierung), covering up the indeterminable, but at the same time bringing it into experience by presenting the necessity of selective determination.

So religion – in Luhmann's perspective – per se has to do with both sides: the determined and the indeterminable, immanence and transcendence. Due to this analysis of the reference problem of religion, the *certainty* of belief cannot possibly be, even if it can be easily operationalized empirically, the only 'measure' of religiosity. One could say: To grasp religion empirically presupposes also to grasp the horizon of uncertainty, that is the back-side of religious symbolization, only covered up but not erased by religious symbols, may they be called God, fate, destiny or anything else.

Luhmann's theory has provoked a big debate among theologians, philosophers, and sociologists (Koslowski, 1985) about the possibility to define religion in merely functional terms, and some authors have suggested to combine a functional and a substantial way of defining religion (Pollack, 1995).

Luhmann (1987) himself – as a response to the discussion about his book – has added further elements to his theory of religion. The question of the function of religion, as he concedes, only leads to the distinction of different functionally equivalent possibilities to solve the reference problem of religion. But the question remains if the mere performing of this function is sufficient as a condition to explain the emergence of a specific subsystem for religion. In line with his theory about the differentiation of subsystems Luhmann adds a further precondition: The emergence of a religious subsystem depends on the existence of a specific binary code of communication that distinguishes religious from non-religious communication: For the religious system this is the *distinction between immanence and transcendence.* While immanence guarantees the code's connectivity with the experience of everyday life, transcendency puts this experience into a different light (Luhmann, 1987, 239). So it is not the reference to transcendency alone, that characterizes religion, but the interconnectedness of both.

In his book "Funktion der Religion" Luhmann also contributes to the debate on secularization. From the perspective of the theory of societal differentiation, secularization refers to the consequences of functional differentiation for the religious subsystem. Also under the condition of functional differentiation the

different subsystems still depend on each other. Therefore the process of secularization doesn't necessarily imply the decline of religion. But the conditions for entering the religious sphere change in the course of secularization in a fundamental way.

Since everyone in functionally differentiated societies is able to participate in any social subsystem (inclusion), religious participation is open to everybody, but can also be rejected by everybody. This is what Luhmann calls the "privatization of decision-making": participation in religious communication as well as belief can only be expected as a matter of individual choice. While it used to be a private matter *not to* believe, now it becomes a private matter *to* believe (Luhmann, 1977, 238 f.).

In a functionally differentiated society, according to Luhmann's view, religion faces chances as well as problems. The chances result from the greater selectivity and functional specificity of the religious subsystem. But this also implies the problem, that religion cannot be the basis of social integration: It becomes possible to decide against religion without losing the capacity to participate in other subsystems. In Luhmann's theory the Durkheimian solution for the problem of social integration is no longer possible.

4. Secularization and Individualization

The german-speaking countries, as other countries in the world, had their debate on secularization (as an early comment see Matthes, 1962; for the whole debate see Tschannen, 1991). Certainly, this was heavily influenced by the theory of Peter L. Berger, which was recently attacked by Stephen Warner (1993) as a theory that reflects 'European' experience more than the American situation. Still, it was also Luckmann's notion of "privatization" and individualization of religion that added a specific note to this debate. And the discussion on Ulrich Beck's theory of individualization (Beck, 1986), which dominated German academic life in sociology for more than ten years, played into that as well.

Krüggeler and Voll (1993) suggest to interpret the decline of church-oriented religiosity in terms of a *structural individualization*. In their concise theoretical outline to a study on religion in Switzerland (Dubach/Campiche, 1993) they point out four different dimensions of such a structural individualization: 1. a tendency towards religious syncretism; 2. a growing need for self-presentation and self-reflection; 3. a growing consciousness of contingency; 4. new forms of and changes within existing religious organizations.

These considerations get their empirical foundation in a representative survey on religion in Switzerland. The study shows that, although most Swiss people remain members of a church, they interpret their membership in a very pragmatic and lowly committed way. One third of the church members belong to the "customer"-type – the biggest group found in the study – who define their relationship with the church mainly as an exchange-relationship. They pay and want something in exchange (Dubach, 1993).

Regarding the contents of belief, the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism have mostly vanished in the eyes of church members. In addition to that, elements of Christian tradition intermingle under the surface of Christian orientation with elements of other religions or with those of humanistic traditions. Those belonging to the group of "religious humanists" (about half of the respondents) are open to questions of transcendency in general, but hardly agree with Christian answers to the problem of death (Krüggeler, 1993).

When asked about the future of humanity, more people see it dependent on the values of solidarity and equality – which Krüggeler considers part of Switzerland's civil religion – than on religious or Christian values (Krüggeler, 1993, 113).

According to the authors the results of this study assert the diagnosis of an individualized pluralism in the field of religion. But, as a whole, they don't try to substitute the term individualization for the term secularization. Rather, in line with Luhmann's argument (and not far from Luckmann's), they perceive secularization as a consequence of societal differentiation in the religious field, especially the privatization of religious decision-making.

But some authors who contributed to the discussion about secularization are rather critical regarding the term secularization and speak of individualization as opposed to secularization. Karl Gabriel (1992), who in his analysis of the decline of the catholic milieu pointed to an important condition of "structural individualization", sees a two-sided development going on: Even if the Christian churches remain relevant, they have lost their monopoly in 'administrating' the sacred, and there is a rising need for religiosity outside the churches.

Detlef Pollack (1996; 1998) has rejected this position by referring to data about religious orientations in East- and West-Germany: he showed, that – inspite of some alternative religiosity existing outside the churches – these forms of religiosity are more attractive to people, who are still members of the church than to people who have quit their church-membership. So, turning away from the churches implies in most of the cases also turning away from other forms of religiosity. This is even more the case in East Germany than in the West. These findings suggest that should the religious culture of a country

prove successfully destroyed (as happened in the GDR through the political intervention of the SED), it is not very likely that alternative religions will flourish in compensation for a declining church-membership.

The findings also indicate that secularization – at least in the case of Germany, but in the case of some other European countries as well – in fact also implies a *decline* in subjective religiosity, even if this is not a necessary consequence (see Jagodzinski, 1998). But, of course, the question is of how to define religiosity (see Pollack, 1995). Survey research usually asks about belief in a higher power, participation in cultic activities and similar things. But it can't grasp what Thomas Luckmann had in mind when he spoke of "invisible religion": the subjective systems of ultimate significance centering around individuality and the private sphere.

Franz Höllinger's (1996) study "Volksreligion und Herrschaftskirche" added a new perspective to the debate on secularization. In a comparative historical analysis of the religious development in different European countries – especially Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland – he develops the thesis that the different levels of religiosity in European countries are deeply rooted in the diverse historical patterns of relationships between the church and the people, that go back to the different ways of Christianization in these nations. So, in Höllinger's view, secularization or modernization per se, do not necessarily lead to a decline of religiosity. The very specific national histories of the relationships between the church and the people – especially the 'formative phases' of Christianization – have an enduring influence on people's commitment towards Christian religion. When Christian religion is introduced "from above" in opposition to pre-existing cultural traditions and values and exerted mainly by an authoritative church (Herrschaftskirche) it is likely – according to Höllinger's argument – that the commitment towards this kind of religion will remain low and superficial and – under the conditions of modernization – religious decline will result.

It is not possible here to discuss this argument in detail. But this book certainly is an important new contribution to the debate on secularization inasmuch as it opposes monocausal interpretations of religious decline. It can also add a new element to the recent 'American' debate about the relationship between religious pluralism and religious vitality which sometimes – at least in its economic variants – seems to assume that high religious participation rates are a necessary outcome of religious pluralism: "the more pluralism, the greater the religious mobilization of the population" (Finke/Stark, 1988, 43; see also Stark/Iannacone, 1994). Höllinger's study underlines the importance of long-existing cultural patterns that create very specific conditions for the vitality or the decline of religion in different countries.

5. Irreligiosity and Religious Indifference: the East-German case and beyond

German reunification has shed a new light onto the debate on secularization, as it has brought the very special case of East-Germany to the attention of sociologists. East Germany was of interest not only regarding the specific role of the Protestant church and the massive decline of church membership during the GDR (Pollack, 1994), but also regarding the changes that many observers expected after the reunification: especially the rise of sects and cults in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin wall. But the East German population thoroughly disappointed these expectations. In the first years after the reunification church membership, although already extremely low, declined even more, and this was in no way compensated by commitments in alternative religious organizations. About 67 percent of the East-German population don't belong to any church (Pickel, 2000; see also Pollack, 1994a), and – asked for the belief in God or a higher power – more than 50 percent decisively reject this.

But even if these rates of irreligiosity are extraordinary high compared to other Western-European (and also Eastern European) countries, the numbers of those who don't belong to a religious denomination are on the rise and demand sociological attention also in other parts of Europe. Dubach (1998) has shown for Switzerland, that these are mostly younger people of higher education and social status, occupied in the "modern" well-paid professions of the service sector, especially in jobs that have to do with culture, science and communication. They have often been regionally mobile and they tend to be single, divorced or to cohabitate with their partners. Gender, which once seemed a clear indicator for religious commitment, in the meantime doesn't predict religiosity very well. If women's occupational status is equal to men, they are as likely to be religiously indifferent as men.

Regarding the social profile of non-church-members Pickel (2000) found similar results for Germany. But still, there are very different levels of non-members in East and West Germany. Whereas only 15 percent of the West-German don't belong to a church, in East Germany this is the case for two thirds of the population. Pickel's findings also indicate, that those, who don't belong to a church, in most of the cases also lack religiosity of any other kind (at least as far as the existing survey research items can grasp other kinds of religiosity).

The rising number of those who don't belong to a religious denomination and are religiously indifferent provokes the question, what (and *whether* anything

at all) substitutes for the old religious beliefs. We know something about the social structure of the religiously indifferent, but not too much about their "systems of ultimate significance", to use Thomas Luckmann's phrase. In a study on managers' ethical and religious orientations, Kaufmann (1989, 146 ff.) considers 'self-assertion through self-reference as a new form of religiosity' (Kaufmann 1989, 170). It would be interesting to know if this proves valid only for members of these professions and for upper social strata or – for example – also for the East-German population.

Based on a study on morality in East- and West-Germany (Meulemann, 1998) – showing a higher degree of 'moral rigidity' among the population of East Germany compared to West Germany – Heiner Meulemann assumes that a "socialist morality" was successfully installed as a substitute for the expelled Christian orientation, but that it is loosing ground since the political transformation.

The research on religious indifference is still in the beginning, but it probably will become an important area of research in the future, and it could be a way of analyzing "systems of ultimate significance" that don't gain their contents from the source of substantive religiosity.

6. Sociology of religion or sociology of the churches? Qualitative and quantitative approaches

Thomas Luckmann's attack (Luckmann, 1960) on the "sociology of the churches" (Kirchensoziologie) that in his perspective had narrowed the scope of research on religion to the field of participation in church-activities, and his plea for widening the perspective by differentiating between religion and commitment to the church and by reconnecting sociology of religion to classical sociological thought, certainly was an important stimulus for the further development of this field (see also Matthes, 1968).

There is no doubt that even today the kind of research that Luckmann had in mind when he wrote his review 40 years ago is still going on. But it would be an inadequate curtailment to immediately equate studies that refer to data of church-going activities to this type of 'sociology of the churches'.

Looking at current survey research, we see that church-going indeed in many of the cases is a good predictor for Christian but also for substantive religiosity outside Christianity. As Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere (1993) have shown for different European countries, the decline in church-going actually goes together with a decline in Christian beliefs, and – as Pollack and Pickel

have stressed – leaving the church in Germany in general goes together with turning away from substantive religion, may it be Christian or "alternative". The Swiss study (Dubach/Campiche, 1993) shows that representative survey research is able to use sophisticated instruments not only in terms of statistics but also in their efforts to grasp the varieties of religious orientation. For this reason the old confrontation between 'sociology of religion' and 'sociology of the churches' that all too often implied that sociology of religion was the only really sociological perspective (see Feige, 1994), probably will not be the main confrontation of the future.

In addition to that, a high awareness for different forms of "alternative religiosity" often darkened the fact that these forms are only attractive to a very small part of the population, and that the public debates about this kind of religiosity sometimes tell more about public fear and fascination than about actually strong tendencies to engage in this kind of religiosity. But this is in itself an interesting sociological phenomenon. Public nervousness and awareness about alternative religious activities might even be seen as an indicator for secularization: If religions of any kind leave the private sphere and "go public", they tend to be seen as dangerous and violating the implicit norm that religiosity is a "private thing". This is not only the case for "alternative" religions but also for Islam, which will certainly be of growing interest in the future.

And – in addition to its role as an indicator for substantive religiosity – "sociology of the churches" will certainly remain important as an "organizational" approach towards religion. As the example of Max Weber (1976) (with his church-sect-typology), but also the more recent examples of Niklas Luhmann (1972), Karl Gabriel (1976; 1999) and Hans Geser (1999) have shown, an organizational approach can as well be placed in a framework of modernization theory and can imply highly theoretical efforts. But this would presuppose that religious organizations, especially the churches, are open to this kind of organizational research, without narrowing their perspectives to the question of how to gain more active members.

But despite this relativization of the old confrontation between "sociology of religion" and "sociology of the churches", important differences remain between certain approaches. Today, these differences tend to be formulated in terms of methodology rather than in terms of research areas. Even if participation in church-activities is still a good indicator for the stability or instability of certain religious beliefs and practices, it neither grasps what Thomas Luckmann called "subjective systems of ultimate significance" nor does it grasp the concrete conditions under which religion becomes personally relevant (or irrelevant) and the structural problems (of biographies, of groups etc.) related to these processes of becoming religious or irreligious. And, even if survey research

gives us important quantitative data about beliefs, it cannot grasp the personal meanings of belief and religiosity[3] and how these refer to existing social codes of religiosity and to social processes of religious communication (see Tyrell/ Krech/Knoblauch, 1998). In order to analyze religion as a symbolic system of meaning we need an adequate, reconstructive methodology. Survey data – which are very useful for other purposes – certainly do not grasp the symbolic dimension of religion sufficiently.

For this reason there have been several studies during the last years choosing an interpretative, often biographical approach for the analysis of religiosity (Schöll, 1992; Comenius-Institut, 1993; Fischer/Schöll, 1994; Wohlrab-Sahr, 1995; Wohlrab-Sahr 1999). In most of these studies research dealt with biographical phases that go along with transformations, especially adolescence, but also with religiously coded processes of transformation, like conversion. Religious conversion, a classic field in the American sociology of religion, has attracted only recently broader interest of researchers in the German-speaking countries (Knoblauch/Krech/Wohlrab-Sahr, 1998; Wohlrab-Sahr, 1999).[4] It is a field in which the different dimensions that play into religion can be thoroughly studied: the influence of group communication (Krech/Schlegel, 1998), the social codification of religious experience, the emerging or transformation of religiosity under certain biographical and social conditions and the function that religion fulfills for biographies and for social groups.

A new study on conversion to Islam in Germany and the USA (Wohlrab-Sahr, 1999) shows *how* conversion is related to biographical and group experience and how it symbolically transforms experiences of crisis and social devaluation. There are some similarities between this approach and Lipp's theory about the relationship between charisma and stigma.

Many of the studies that approach religion from a microsociological perspective not only present "interesting cases". They are deeply anchored in sociological theory and try hard to go all the way from case to type to sociological theory. But, of course, microsociological approaches also need to be informed by survey research in order to be able to locate their cases within the broader panorama of religious developments. And survey research, in turn, needs qualitative analyses in order to get a deeper understanding of what religiosity

3 Matthes (1993) would even go further in this argument: As intercultural research indicates, a type of research using preformulated concepts of religion as something that is considered being "apart" from society, for the study of foreign societies, creates "other" religions after the image of European religions and by this has a high risk of creating artefacts.

4 There has been, of course, some important research before, especially in the context of Thomas Luckmann's efforts to reconstruct "genres of communication" (kommunikative Gattungen), conversion narratives being one of them (see Ulmer, 1988; Luckmann, 1986).

and irreligiosity actually mean beyond belonging to certain groups and sharing certain beliefs.

7. Conclusive Remarks

Sociology of religion in the German-speaking countries has developed as an area of profound empirical and theoretical efforts in sociology, with contributions from sociologists of diverse backgrounds. It has again – after many years of absence – successfully institutionalized as a section within the German Sociological Association (DGS). But, one has to say, it has developed in this way *not because of* institutional support from the universities, but rather *in spite of* its *poor* institutionalization in German universities. Although there are many sociologists – theoretically and empirically – working in this field, not a single sociology department in German universities offers a teaching position in sociology of religion. From an sarcastic standpoint, one might take this as a further proof of a process of secularization, but one may also take it as a sign of the lasting influence of some members of a generation who didn't assume religion as an adequate field of sociological research, unless it was research on the "classics". The old dichotomy between 'sociology of religion' and 'sociology of the churches', which in the meantime is far from reality, survives however as an interpretative scheme, supporting this view. So the institutionalization of sociology of religion in the universities is left to the theology departments – and even this rather poorly –, going along with the inevitable problems of the incongruity of perspectives, that Peter L. Berger spoke about a long time ago (Berger, 1988, 97 f.; 169–176). But to go into this in more detail would take another article.

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