

## Hartmut Zinser: The End Of Secularization

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*Translation by Andreas Fliedner*

1. When, more than forty years ago, in 1965, I took up the subject of Religious Studies as an undergraduate – in the west this was the time of the students-movement – people frequently asked about my intention in choosing this course of studies. Fellow students as well as people outside of the university were astonished about my interest in religion. They were surprised that someone still regarded religion as a subject worth of serious inquiry. They rather held religion to be an anachronism, a historical phase of human development, maybe of necessity in the past but obsolete today. They regarded religion as something dead, at best as a thing of historical interest. Religion might have had its share in the development of mankind, but it certainly had caused a lot of harm: Oppression, war, witch-hunts and the Inquisition. Religion was perceived as a stronghold of backwardness and reaction whereas enlightenment and science were the agenda of the day.

When, in the following years, churches in Germany and many other European countries experienced a dramatic loss of members, this was regarded to proof that religion was a thing of the past. Contrary developments, as the rise of church-memberships in the USA were ignored or explained away as anomalies in a general development of human society.

The sociology of religion considered this process as a detachment from religious orientation and as a decline of religion, which had lost its grip on society. Modern society was held to be based on scientific knowledge and on principles inaugurated by the French Revolution of 1789: Equality, Liberty, and Fraternity. But it was ignored that these principles were secular versions of the claims of the New Testament:<sup>2</sup> Equality of men before God, Freedom and Charity. These are claims which – at least in this form – can not be found in other religions. Of course Greek and Roman philosophy – especially Stoicism – have been named as sources for these principles. I do not intend to enter this discus-

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<sup>2</sup> On liberty see 2.Kor 3.1; Jak 2.13f.; Rom 8.20f.; Gal 5.1, 18f.; on equality see Gal 3,28; on justice see Mat 5,20; on charity see Mat 23.39; on peace and abstention from violence see Mat 5.9, 20 and 5.44.

sion. But I think it is undisputable that these principles are contained in the New Testament and that it was Christianity which established them in the course of European history.

I was told again and again that by separating state and church and by privatizing religion, modernity had overcome religion as a source of orientation as well as an organizing power of public and private life. What did prevail of religion were only remains, which would disappear or at least fall into insignificance with the complete separation of state and church.<sup>3</sup> [Therefore, it was considered superfluous to study the phenomenon of religion.] This historical and social process was termed 'secularization', and became a concept widely approved in the self-fashioning of the modern industrial and bureaucratic society.

In recent years it seems that the secularization thesis has lost some of its appeal as a description of the development of modernity.

In the 1970th the so called New Religious Movements appeared throughout Europe and exercised an irritating fascination on young people. This seemed to contradict the common postulate of a diminishing religiosity. Also, so called 'fundamentalist' movements emerged, which demanded to base social and private life exclusively on religious principles. They gained public attention with spectacular and sometimes violent action. This was another phenomenon which made questionable the assumption of a historical process leading to a decline of religion. Especially the worldwide appearance of fundamentalist Islamic groups could not be ignored. Members of these groups were not recruited from backward, uneducated and neglected social strata, but had often completed a higher education.<sup>4</sup> Eventually it was also recognized that evangelical, pneumatic and pentecostal variations of Christianity were spreading in South-America and other parts of the so called 'Third World' and even gained followers in Europe.

Nevertheless the formula "The churches are empty but Religion is on the rise", as it is time and again repeated in the media, is doubtlessly wrong. In Germany membership in so called 'New Religious Movements' has never significantly exceeded 1 per cent of the population while seventy per cent are still members of the established churches. This means, the New Religious Organizations failed to win over a significant number of those who had left the churches.<sup>5</sup> Likewise organized Atheists and Free-thinkers are wrong to claim those who left the churches as atheists. In Germany organised atheists and free-thinkers are a marginal group of less than 1% of the population.

Nevertheless certain gurus and preachers of this new religiosity were able to gather audiences of thousands at their performances. But participants of these events seldom became members of one of the New Religious Organizations.

<sup>3</sup> which, as I want to add, is still not completed in some European countries.

<sup>4</sup> The 9/11 Commission Report, New York-London, for portraits of the assassins see p. 145-73.

<sup>5</sup> See D. Pollock, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos?*, Tübingen 2003, p. 12.

They rather acted as an audience, attending different events without committing themselves to any kind of durable relationship with a certain guru, his teachings or other members of the audience. I have therefore termed such events as 'religious entertainment' or 'audience-centred-religion'.<sup>6</sup> Participants rarely describe as religion what they seek or expect at these events. They rather use the term 'spirituality', in order to distinguish themselves from dogmatic and bureaucratic forms of religion. Especially in retrospective participants describe such events rather as part of their leisure- and entertainment-activities.

In recent years it has been - and it still is - especially alarming that religious affiliation plays a central role in wars and civil wars all over the world. I do not want to enter the discussion if wars and civil wars like those in India, the Middle-East, in former Yugoslavia and Sri Lanka can rightfully be termed Wars of Religion. But it can not be ignored that in these conflicts the lines between enemy-camps are drawn along the lines of religious affiliation. Religious affiliation<sup>7</sup> is the criterion to distinguish between friend and enemy. Religion can motivate a person to kill or to take the risk of being killed. This painfully indicates the limits of the claim that the power of religion is in decline and that religious affiliations are loosing their grip on people.

These phenomena have in recent years led to an intense debate on the question whether secularization is indeed a central element of modernity. Thomas Luckmann even termed secularization a "modern myth".<sup>8</sup> Other social scientists quietly dropped the secularization thesis.<sup>9</sup> But its validity had already been questioned in the 1950s. In 1965 David Martin published an article entitled "Towards eliminating the concept of secularization".<sup>10</sup>

A central problem of the discussion is the ambiguous use of the term 'secularization'. The scientific debate of recent years leaves the impression that there is no common understanding of the concept. Lübke (1965), Shinner (1967), Blumenberg (1974), and Marramo (1994), amongst others, have discussed the different meanings the term 'secularization' might adopt. Shinner even took into consideration "that the term secularization should be dropped entirely".<sup>11</sup> Others like Detlev Pollack argued that the term might be still of analytical value, depending on how religion and modernity are defined.

<sup>6</sup> See H. Zinser, *Gruppe*, in: *Metzler Lexikon Religion*, Stuttgart 1999, Vol. 1, p. 523-529.

<sup>7</sup> *Sometimes even the ancestral religion as in former Yugoslavia.*

<sup>8</sup> Th. Luckmann, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos*, in: *Lebenswelt und Gesellschaft*, Paderborn 1980, p.161 – 172.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Peter Berger.

<sup>10</sup> D. Martin, "Towards eliminating the concept of secularization", in: *Penguin survey of the social sciences*, J. Gould (ed.), Baltimore 1965, p. 169-82.

<sup>11</sup> L. Shinner, *The Meanings of Secularization*, in: 1967, p. 62.

2. Many of the sociological and historical theories of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century take secularization to be an essential feature of the modern period, a period which is characterized by industrialization, urbanization and democratization. Theories of secularization were central to evolutionary theories of progress as well as to social theories of the 19th century. In the emergence of the discipline of Religious Studies and in the formation of many of its concepts the process of secularization and the secularization thesis played an implicit role, which can hardly be overestimated. The so called law of three stages of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) may serve as an example.<sup>12</sup> Comte assumed a theological stage in the history of mankind, which was followed by a metaphysical or philosophical stage and would end in the positive stage of science. The German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72) postulated a similar progressive development. Feuerbach proceeded from a stage of indirect self-consciousness of man, in which the religious man projects his inward nature in an other, in God, to a stage of immediate self-consciousness, in which man recognizes his nature in himself, as man. Feuerbach therefore intended to change men from "candidates of the hereafter into students of this world".<sup>13</sup>

A slightly different model was developed by James George Frazer.<sup>14</sup> Frazer assumed an age of magic, which was characterized by the belief in non-personal but regular laws of cause and effect. The age of magic was followed by an age of religion, in which man recognized ghosts and gods as efficacious powers and tried to achieve his goals and wishes by the worship of those ghosts and gods. The age of religion was, according to Frazer, finally replaced by the age of science, in which man seeks to achieve his goals and wishes by natural means. Frazer left the question unsettled, if the age of science was to be followed by further stages of human development. But when Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) used Frazer's assumptions in his own outline of the development of mankind and individual, he postulated the formation of a consciousness and behaviour based on the correct perception of reality as a final goal. He held religion to be an illusion, which for the sake of mankind's future had to be given up.<sup>15</sup>

Max Weber (1864-1920) time and again has been named as one of the fathers of the secularization thesis – a disputable ascription in my opinion. Weber observed a process of 'disenchantment' in the course of history. This process was characterized by an intellectualization and rationalization of man's view of nature and of his social relations, especially in the fields of economics and work, in law, in administration and science. Furthermore, according to Weber, modernity brought about a detachment from religion. But, as Weber tried to show in his sociology of religion and – regarding the individual – in his studies on Protestantism, it was religion itself, which had stimulated the historical process of rationalization. On the other hand he observed in his own day a failure of rational science to give answers to questions of importance, like the question for the sense of life. He therefore diagnosed a longing for religion, cha-

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<sup>12</sup> A. Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, Paris 1830-42.

<sup>13</sup> L. Feuerbach, *Vorlesungen über das Wesen der Religion*, Ges. Werke Vol. 6, Berlin 1967, p.31.

<sup>14</sup> J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, London<sup>3</sup> 1906-1915.

<sup>15</sup> S. Freud, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, Ges. Werke Vol.14, p.367.

risma and charismatic personalities.<sup>16</sup> Besides the belief in progress he noticed a need for "deliverance from the rationalism and intellectualism of science".<sup>17</sup> And continued: ""Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another"" (p.330), and: "Who will answer [. . .] the question: What are we to do, how should we lead our lives? Or to take up the metaphor: Which of the warring gods shall we serve? Or should we serve perhaps an entirely different god, and who is he?" (p.335). For Weber science is not able to answer these questions. At best – but that is not to be despised – science contributes to the technology of controlling life. It can develop methods of thinking and it can help us to gain clarity about the questions outlined before. And lastly it can help us to give ourselves an account of the ultimate meaning of our own conduct (p.332-4). Weber did neither share the optimistic view on progress, nor the confidence of the evolutionary theories of his age, in which secularization held a central part.<sup>18</sup>

This process of detachment from religion – from Christianity to be precise – was called secularization. But, if one takes a closer look at the concept and at the historical and social process linked to it, it turns out that the term secularization takes up a variety of meanings.

First, secularization may be conceived as a decline of religion. Religion no longer maintains its role as a spiritual authority from which arises the arrangement of individual life and the order of society. Religious institutions, namely the churches, loose their supposed influence on politics, society and the life of the individual.

Second, secularization can refer to a mundane orientation and de-sacralization of life. A religious conception of the world with an essential reference to god is replaced by a conception of the world, where the points of reference remain strictly inside the world.

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<sup>16</sup> *With biting irony Weber points at "the need of some modern intellectuals to furnish their souls with, so to speak, guaranteed genuine antiques. In doing so, they happen to remember that religion has belonged among such antiques, and of all things religion is what they do not possess. By way of substitute, however, they play at decorating a sort of domestic chapel with small sacred images from all over the world, or they produce surrogates through all sorts of psychic experiences to which they ascribe the dignity of mystic holiness, which they peddle in the book market. This is plain humbug or self-deception."* M. Weber, *Science as a Vocation*, in: *Essay in Sociology*, translated by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York 1946.

<sup>17</sup> M. Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, in: *Soziologie, Universalgeschichtliche Analysen, Politik*, Stuttgart 1973, p.322.

<sup>18</sup> *The view of Franzmann, Gärtner, Klöck, Religiosität in der säkularisierten Welt, Wiesbaden 2006, p. 13, seems one-sided: "Er (M.Weber) bezeichnet als analytisch-wertfreier soziologischer (sic!) Begriff den umfassenden Vorgang einer 'Entzauberung der Welt', einer Verweltlichung bzw. Verdiesseitigung von Weltbildern und Glaubensinhalten als Teil des universalhistorischen Rationalisierungsprozesses. Säkularisierung wird hier als gerichteter Prozess verstanden, der sämtliche Aggregierungsebenen von Lebenspraxis berührt, von der politischen Herrschaft über Organisationen bis zur Familie und zum Individuum."* ["He (M.Weber) denotes as an analytical sociological concept the comprehensive process of a 'disenchantment of the world', a mundanization and transfer to this world of conceptions of the world and of contents of belief as part of the universal historical process of rationalization. Secularization is understood as a progressive development touching all levels of life from political rule and organization to family and the individual."]

Third, this may be conceived as a de-sacralization of the world, a process in which the religious interpretation of the world is substituted by scientific, rational and logical explanations of the world and of life.

Fourth, secularization may be understood as a disengagement of society from religion. Religion, which has formerly been a means of the self-fashioning of a society, has its place now solely in the private life of the individual.

Further, secularization may denote the transfer of religious contents, beliefs, or patterns of behaviour into the secular sphere. On the one hand this may indicate that a religion adapts itself to the world and its demands, for example that it modifies or even gives up its principles of a devout or holy life. The religion merges with the world. On the other hand the transposition of religious contents can mean their detachment from all forms of revelation or transcendence. Lastly it may take up a quite contrary meaning as in Hegel's "transposition of the kingdom of heaven into this world".<sup>19</sup>

3. Some of these contents of the term secularization overlap, some contradict each other. It has therefore been proposed to distinguish three main aspects: First, processes of differentiation, during which religion and church lose their influence on social institutions or withdraw from them. Second, processes of rationalization, which replace religious prescriptions and norms in fields like economy or science by a logic inherent to these fields. Third, an orientation towards this world, which brings about the abandonment or limitation of religious preoccupations – like for example the concern for the salvation of one's soul.

Sometimes secularization is also described as a consequence of the functional differentiation of the spheres of life in modern societies in the course of industrialization, urbanization and democratization (N. Luhmann).

There is another aspect of secularization which especially the sociology of religion sometimes seems to neglect. During the reformation period the state gave up its claim to take care for the spiritual welfare of its citizens and left the question of religious truth to the churches.<sup>20</sup> This secularization – denoting the religious neutrality of the state – made it possible that members of different churches and later in European history adherents of different religions could live together peacefully within one state. The secularization of the state meant insofar "the safeguarding of religious liberty" (Heckel, S. 51).

<sup>19</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Ges. Werke Vol.4*, p. 315-24, 1968.

<sup>20</sup> See M. Haeckel, *Korrolarien zur Säkularisierung*, Heidelberg 1981. E. W. Böckenförde, *Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisierung*, in: *Recht, Staat, Freiheit*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991.

Furthermore the German language distinguishes between the terms "Säkularisation" und "Säkularisierung". In scientific discussion it has been generally agreed upon to use the term "Säkularisation" to denote the transfer of church goods into civil possession as it took place during the Reformation and in the time of the French Revolution. Thereby the transfer of church goods – "Säkularisation" – which has taken place time and again in the history of Christianity is distinguished from "Säkularisierung" - denoting a general trend in history away from religion towards a scientific orientation. In English and French a comparable terminological distinction does not exist.

Sometimes the term 'secularism' is still used. In its strict sense secularism denotes a world-view, which promotes the shaping of social and individual life according to human reason and (utilitarian) ethics without any reference to god or other non-human powers. The concept was introduced by G. J. Holyoake (1817-1906).

Sociology, Political Science and the Sociology of Religion often asserted a universal development away from religion towards a worldly bias of society and the individual. Thus, a specific development of disaffiliation from the churches, which could be observed in Europe since the reformation and which intensified since the French revolution, was presented as a universal historical process. In research and literature on comparative religion and religious studies, this claim is rarely to be found. Although scholars of religious studies use the term secularization, they mostly do not adopt the secularization thesis understood as the postulate of an inevitable decline of religion. Without doubt evolutionistic notions are fundamental to many concepts of religious studies. The construction of a development from the amoral gods of the Greeks with their limited powers to the one supremely good and all-powerful god of the Christians or the assumed development from bloody sacrifice to sublimated forms of sacrifice and the transformation of sacrifice to asceticism might serve as examples.

Instead of postulating a linear development from religion to science, scholars of religious studies in the twentieth century preferred to describe the phenomena as transformation or social change. I assume that the 'ups' and 'downs' of religion in the centuries and millennia of human history were too much on their mind to allow them to universalize a development which only took place within the last two hundred years, and which is largely restricted to the confines of Christian Europe. Only scholars who understand religious studies as an outright critique of religion have partly embraced the secularization thesis. Also I suppose, historians of religion have always been aware that the tie between state/society and church/religion which is prerequisite to their separation is itself a product of history.

3.1. From the words of Christ in the New Testament a tie between state and religion cannot be derived, even if some texts of the New Testament have been used to support this claim. The adversaries of an institutionalized church argued throughout the history of Christianity that alternative forms of organization were possible, as could be seen in

the monastic orders, the protestant sects or the American denominations.<sup>21</sup> Anyway, the New Testament says: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Mat 22.21) or "My kingdom is not of this world" (Joh. 18.36). The church historian Adolf von Harnack comments that it was the "Greatness" of Christ "that he did not change worldly conditions, did not give statuesque orders for the future, that he did not ensnare himself in the times altogether."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the organisation of the church is not arbitrary. As a religious movement Christianity had to develop a social organisation in order not to disappear or to remain a marginal group.

It was not before the end of antiquity and the religio-political provisions of the Christian emperors, starting with the edict "cunctos populos" of 380, that an intimate tie between Christianity and state was established. If I may venture to resume within a few words a process which spans more than a thousand years: The alliance between church and empire was prepared since the time of Constantine or even since the Episcopal churches of the third century. It developed during the middle-ages in the conflicts between emperor and pope and has adopted different and changing shapes in the European countries. This process might be studied exemplarily in the conflict about the appointing of bishops and its different solutions. But it should be noted that without the multi-faceted alliances between the Christian churches and the state, a secularization – understood as the separation of state and church – would not have been possible. Secularization as a historical process therefore requires a process of sacralization. Remarkably the process of sacralization, of making-sacred, of *sacrum facere* is not explored, seldom even mentioned in the theories of secularization but is mostly somehow taken for granted.

4. But what is actually meant by sacralization? Although the term itself originates from the modern period, the action of making-sacred or sanctification has always been an element of religion<sup>23</sup>. In the Roman religion of antiquity offerings, pieces of land (*templum*), buildings (*aedes*), items of devotion, but also persons<sup>24</sup> could be consecrated to the gods. Some religions have developed elaborate rites of initiation for the sacralization of persons. Such rites also mark the difference between the sphere of the profane and the sacred. In Roman religion this can be observed in the *inauguratio*. The consent of the gods to the transfer of a person from the mundane to the sacred sphere had to be ob-

<sup>21</sup> See E. Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, 1912, Tübingen 1994.

<sup>22</sup> A. v. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, Tübingen 1914, p.10.

<sup>23</sup> Theoretically the doctrine of sola fide excludes sacralization. In fact the more or less veiled sanctification of things, rights, and institutions soon reappeared.

<sup>24</sup> The consecration or sacralization of persons could be temporal, as was the case with the vestal-virgins or permanent as in the case of the flamen dialis. The flamen dialis was bound, like the rex sacrorum to certain duties and restrictions. In times of war there was a specific consecration of the commander-in-chief: the devotion, see J. Rüpke, p.156ff. If the commander-in-chief survived the battle, he had to abstain for the rest of his life from private or public sacrifice because the obligation of an unfulfilled votum rested upon him, see K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte. Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaften, Abt. 5, Teil 4*, München 1960, p.125-126.

tained by an *augur* or a person who had the rights of an *augurium*. All bearers of office and priests of the so called great collegia, with the exception of the vestal-virgins were inaugurated.<sup>25</sup>

As a rule objects were consecrated permanently to the gods and priesthood was obtained for life; even after death the priesthood is indicated by its *insignia* on the tombstone of the deceased. Others, like the vestal-virgins were only consecrated for a limited span of time, thirty years. Likewise a place could be consecrated temporarily for a sacrifice or an *augurium*. After the burial rites the grave was considered a *locus religiosus* and every intrusion, even the cutting of trees, had to be followed by certain rites of atonement.

Generally objects consecrated to the gods were withdrawn from individual disposition, as is indicated in Roman and Greek religion by the prescription *ouk ekphorá*, that it is forbidden to remove anything from a sanctuary. Other religions know similar restrictions: What once has been consecrated and handed over to the gods may never more be returned to the use of the individual. For this reason offerings often are damaged – to make them useless for profane usage. Or the heaped up offerings are buried in the sanctuaries, much to the delight of archaeologists of later ages. As Emile Durkheim has remarked in his sociological definition of the sacred, it is an essential characteristic of sanctification or sacralization that the sacred is withdrawn from individual usage and claimed by society.<sup>26</sup>

Of course all religions also have ways to de-sanctify objects, be it simply that a former sanctification is forgotten or pretended to be forgotten. Some religions have invented special proceedings for de-sanctification. For example, in the middle-ages Christianity introduced the *saecularisatio*. In canon-law this term denotes the change of status from *regularis*, member of a monastic order to the status of secular clergy or laymen. But it could also mean the transfer of material goods from church to lay property.<sup>27</sup> Such *saecularisationes* have taken place since the time of Karl Martell.<sup>28</sup> They can be found in Christianity as in all other religions, provided that the consecrated objects are of material interest. As soon as offerings and donations, for example for the maintenance of a sanctuary and its cult, amounted to a treasure, robbers as well as princes would cast an eye on them. Conquerors have seldom refrained from looting temples and sanctuaries.<sup>29</sup> Therefore the sacred always needed a power that produced and warranted not only the sacred itself, but also the distinction between sacred and profane. This power could then easily be transferred to the sacred itself.

Based on its historical situation Christianity developed the specific institution of a church, which defines itself and its teachings as holy: *nulla salus extra ecclesiam*. The church claimed independence from the political powers, some-

<sup>25</sup> For the vestal-virgins see H. Cancik-Lindemeier, *Virgines Vestae*, in: *Von Atheismus bis Zensur, Würzburg 2006*, p. 243-94.

<sup>26</sup> E. Durkheim, *Zur Definition religiöser Phänomene (1898)*, in: J. Matthes, *Religion und Gesellschaft Vol. 1*, Reinbeck 1967, p. 120-41. E. Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens*, Frankfurt a.M. 1981.

<sup>27</sup> This transfer is often termed *profanatio*, see: "Säkularisation, Säkularisierung", in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe Vol. 5*, Stuttgart 1984, p.789-829, especially p.795, 808 et passim.

<sup>28</sup> For Karl Martell see: "Säkularisation, Säkularisierung" in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. O.Brunner et al., Stuttgart 1984.

<sup>29</sup> Also in times of need the treasures of sanctuaries could serve as securities.

times even supremacy, and periodically ventured to accomplish it. Being a part of society it confronted society at the same time as a relatively autonomous institution and was able to accumulate riches which aroused the covetousness of emperors and kings. Also the church took over tasks like schooling and education, care for the sick, and certain judicial and administrative tasks. During the modern period these tasks were gradually reclaimed by the state, sometimes only after intense struggle. This process was either lamented as robbery, expropriation and injustice or applauded as liberation of the church from tasks which were foreign to it. It was also welcomed that secularization liberated the church from the authority of the sovereign. (Heckel 17/8)

It is a further weakness of the secularization thesis that it ascribes the specifically Christian doctrine of the radical separation of god and world to all religions. So the "mundanization of conceptions of the world and of belief-systems" (Franzmann et al. p.13) is identified as a central element of secularization. But the strict separation between the world and god its creator in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is alien to a great number of religions like the Roman religion of antiquity, many tribal religions or the strict form of Theravada-Buddhism. In these religions the gods are a part of this world or, as in Buddhism, they belong to the Maya, to the realm of apparitions and illusions. Does it make sense to speak of secularization as a process of "mundanization and transfer to this world" with respect to religions which do not distinguish between this world and the supernatural?

5. Political decisions made during the French Revolution not only in France but also in other European countries, together with the functional differentiation in all parts of society the modern period brought about, made the *saecularisatio* an occurrence which, in the light of evolutionary theories of progress, could appear as a general, irreversible and inescapable process – as secularization. Secularization became an element in the self-fashioning of modern civil society. In this society decisions concerning not only the adherents of a single religion but all citizens should be made according to rational principles. While during the middle-ages political and social decisions were based on religious principles, and contradictions to these principles were concealed,<sup>30</sup> in modern society all decisions of common concern should be made rationally, following the principles of equality, freedom and fraternity or of social justice. Religious principles should only be valid for the adherents of the particular religion and have no claim to general recognition. With this, religion ceased to be something universal and became something particular, an affair of the private life. The state protects this private affair, but it does not protect any claim against anyone else derived from it, except the claim for tolerance and mutual respect necessary for a peaceful social life. If today general claims are put forward in the name of religion, they are refuted as fundamentalism. Even Christian political parties do not aim at the re-erection of a Christian state or at the unity of political and religious leadership. Nevertheless certain points are

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<sup>30</sup> E.g. the justification of wars and crusades which are not reconcilable with the Christian commandment of peace.

still vehemently disputed as can be seen in the recent discussion about crucifixes in classrooms or in the so called "Headscarf-conflict".

Today the process of separation between state and church, between society and religion has come to a close, even if in many European countries the separation has been carried out only imperfectly. State and churches have agreed to solve all disputes in mutual consent. Only some smaller religious groups still complain about inequality of treatment – a complaint I do not want to minimize. But even these religious groups do not refer to god but to the principles of equality and freedom of religion to enforce their claims, and have in so far accepted the principles of modernity. Only some Islamic groups reject these and take recourse to divine law.<sup>31</sup> In coming years these will be issues of debate in the European Union.

I therefore would venture the thesis that with the separation of state and church, of society and religion, the *saecularisatio* has really come to an end. Even if many details are still a matter of dispute, the general principle of separation is recognized by all parties.

Separation brings about a compromise between worldly and religious claims by means of their privatization. At the same time the principle of separation contains an acceptance of religion. That religion as a private affair should be abolished remains a claim of outsiders. I therefore would venture a second thesis: The secularization thesis, insofar as it postulates a general and irreversible historical process, has outlived itself. Future relations between religion and society will not be determined by the supposed disappearance of religion but by the principle of freedom, which contains freedom of religion. A struggle against religion contradicts the principles of modernity. The secularization thesis – understood as the postulate of a decline and disappearance of religion - was put forward by the philosophy of history and the sociology of religion at a moment of the emancipation of the sciences. The sciences in search for concepts were turning to their own *logos* instead of the *theos* of religion. Thereby the secularization thesis was something particular, resembling the religion it confronted. It replaced the religious message by an ideological message of salvation. A state and a science which are impartial will not adopt one or the other position. The state will rather provide the framework in which, to borrow the words of Max Weber, the "old gods" and the "non-personal powers"

<sup>31</sup> Cf e.g. die redaktionelle Stellungnahme in „Explizit. Das politische Magazin für ein islamisches Bewußtsein. Nr. 30 März – Juni 2002 n.c., Muharram- Rabi’al-Thani 1423 n.H. S. 59, Al-Khilafah Publications, P.O.Box 1100, London CR427ZR; dort lautet es als Antwort zu eine Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Islam und Demokratie: „Es gibt nämlich einen wesentlichen Aspekt, der den Islam mit der Demokratie unvereinbar macht: Die Menschen entwerfen in der Demokratie ihre eigenen Gesetze. ... Aus islamischer Sicht steht die Gesetzgebung allein dem Schöpfer zu, von dessen Existenz wir rational überzeugt sind. Natürlich wäre es auch für uns Muslime viel einfacher, die Demokratie zu übernehmen und der eigenen Launen (?) - und Triebhaftigkeit im Namen der Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit damit Tür und Tor zu öffnen. Stattdessen fügen wir uns den Vorgaben eines höheren Wesens, was uns einiges an Einsatz und Mühe abverlangt.“

will peacefully continue their eternal struggle.<sup>32</sup> Once again I willingly admit that certain issues are still and will remain a matter of dispute and that all claims to fashion social relations according to a religious revelation are to be rejected. But a struggle against religion would contradict the basic principles of modernity.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *A possible task for the discipline of religious studies, which as a science can not take recourse to a god or a revelation, might be to clarify the disputed issues. Furthermore it can elucidate the welcome or unwelcome consequences of different religious claims for the individual and the society.*

<sup>33</sup> *M. Heckel, Korollarien zur Säkularisierung, 1981, p. 47 has expressed this clearly: "The specifically religious questions he [the state] has to leave to the autonomy of the religious denominations. As a free state[freier Kulturstaat] he may not violate the spiritual-worldly unity of these phenomena. He shall not turn the churches into church-museums, theology into religious studies, religious into secular ethical education. As law-giver and administrator he is rather bound to coordinate and to cooperate with the religious denominations."*

## *Addenda*

6.1. It is feasible to describe the transformation of religion in the modern period without referring to the concept of secularization. Up to the present day Christian churches and theologians did not succeed in finding adequate answers to the changes brought about by the development from an agricultural to an industrial, urbanized and democratic society. They failed to offer an interpretation of the Christian revelation which took these changes into account. The vivid and picturesque language of the bible, where for example in the evening "the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water" (Gen24.13) does no longer match with our everyday experience, where water comes from the tap in kitchen and bathroom. Despite manifold theological efforts this problem has until now only inadequately been solved. It is quiet possible that membership in churches, denominations and religious communities will further decline. Many people – not exclusively Christians – can no longer identify with religious ideas, and consider traditional religious notions insufficient for their self-fashioning as well as for communication with others. Likewise the new religions which were imported from Asia or elsewhere did not succeed in meeting these challenges. In western societies only a small minority did adopt their ideas. But, regarding their failure, the churches should not use the secularization thesis as a philosophical solace.

6.2. Yet the separation of state and church in the modern period brought about changes touching the very heart of religion. 'Holy' was - and still is - a key-concept in all religions. According to Emile Durkheim, 'holy' designates what a community conceives and recognizes as holy, withdrawing it from individual disposal and volition and making it an absolute. Often stages of holiness can be distinguished beyond the dichotomy of holy and profane. The distinction between holy and profane was a collective act of the religious community which was accepted or at least respected by its social surrounding. Society gave a warrant for this acceptance of the holy. In the modern period the social warranty for the holy is withdrawn. 'Holy' becomes an individual category.

Durkheim's definition of the holy is of striking clarity. But it is no longer applicable under the conditions of modernity, where the state has withdrawn its warranty for the distinction between holy and profane. In modern society it lingers on as a historical memory at best. Ever since Durkheim's definition the concept of the holy has been the subject of intense scholarly debate. But all later attempts at definition failed to give a convincing account of how an individual might define something as holy, which means as withdrawn from his volition and disposal. It remains contradictory that an individual by his own free choice defines something as holy which at the same time by its holiness is withdrawn from the individual's volition. Another individual might define something else as holy and absolute. The attempts made by Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade and others at a definition of the holy remained unsatisfactory. A socio-

logical theory like the secularization thesis should be able to give a sociological explanation of the holy which is secularized.

6.3. In this context a second problem emerges. I already hinted at the fact that the principles of modernity: freedom, equality, fraternity and social justice are secular versions of central claims of Christianity, even if they can not be exclusively ascribed to Christianity and other sources have to be taken into account. But in Christianity these principles were withdrawn from individual and social volition and awarded divine status – they were sanctified, as one might put it. In the 20th century dictatorships have catastrophically violated the basic principles of society, namely to protect the life and propriety of every citizen, as well as the principles of modernity: Freedom, equality and fraternity. This raises the question whether the principles of modernity remain valid when they are no longer tied to religion and thus no longer warranted by a superhuman authority. As Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde observed: "The free and secular state is based on principles it cannot warrant by its own authority."<sup>34</sup> And he adds: "As a free state it only exists as long as the freedom which it grants to its citizens is regulated from the inside, out of the moral substance of the individual and the homogeneity of society. On the other hand it cannot warrant these regulative forces by its own authority, with the instruments of law and authoritarian command, without abandoning the principle of freedom, thus relapsing into a secularized version of the totalitarian demands it successfully overcame in the course of the confessional wars." Basically the state has at its disposal means of coercion; but it is paradoxical to enforce freedom by means of coercion. This becomes obvious by imagining a law which decrees: "The citizen has to be free. Trespassers are liable to one year imprisonment." Such a notion is absurd. The problem how the basic principles of our society can be warranted beyond revocable agreement remains yet unsolved.

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<sup>34</sup> E.-W. Böckenförde, *Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisierung*, in: *Recht, Staat, Freiheit*, Frankfurt a. M., 1991, p. 112

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