

## ЗАПАДНАЯ ЕВРОПА: К ВОПРОСУ О СЕКУЛЯРИЗАЦИИ

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С опорой на биографический подход анализируется история теории секуляризации. Приводятся примеры личного взаимодействия автора с ее двумя важными теоретиками, Питером Бергером и Томасом Лукманом. Постепенно представляются аргументы в пользу несостоятельности данной теории для интерпретации идеологии и религии в либеральных культурах Западной Европы. Утверждается, что явление, интерпретируемое в качестве секуляризации религии, – это не более чем упразднение навязывавшихся ранее разными государствами идеологических монополий. Результатом этого процесса считается появление мультикультурных и мультирелигиозных плюралистических сообществ. Группы атеистов и глубоко верующих и практикующих христиан находятся в таких обществах на периферии. Они уступают большим группам скептиков, неуверенных и индивидуально-религиозных людей. Поднимается вопрос об индивидуальных стратегиях адаптации современных людей к жизни в условиях регулярной коллизии светских и религиозных реалий современного общества.

**Ключевые слова:** теория секуляризации; религиозная монополия; религиозный плюрализм; атеизм.

## WESTERN EUROPE: SECULARISATION LIGHT

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This article presents a biographical approach to the history of the changes in the theoretical appraisal of the secularisation concept, grounding on personal relations of the author with its two major theoreticians: Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The theory of secularisation is gradually presented as unsuitable for interpreting the ideological/religious dimension of the liberal cultures of Western Europe. It states, that what is currently interpreted as secularisation is in fact the dissolution of imposed fateful ideological monopolies. The result is the development of not mono-colored/secular, but ideologically multicoloured/pluralistic societies. The group of the atheised and of consistently believing and practicing Christians are typologically on the fringes of the society, while the largest groups are the skeptics, the insecure, but also the privately-religious. The question is raised about coping strategies of contemporary people, living in the inconsistent world of constant collusion of the secular and the religious realities.

**Keywords:** theory of secularisation; religious monopoly; religious pluralism; atheism.

You asked me to say a few words about the far-reaching issue of secularisation in Western European societies, and this under the title «Secularisation light». I will choose a biographical approach. At the end, backed by my mentor and friend Peter L. Berger, I will defend the position that the theory of secularisation is unsuitable for interpreting the ideological/religious dimension of the liberal cultures

of Western Europe. The theory of secularisation is used rather as an instrument: by church leaders who are tormented by the transformation of their church from the Constantinian era to today's pluralistic era, but also by ideological warriors who do not want to come to terms with the fact that a forcefully implemented end of religion does not seem to be taking hold.

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## Habilitation studies in Konstanz with Thomas Luckmann

In 1970, during my postdoctoral studies with Thomas Luckmann in Konstanz, I dealt intensively with the secularisation assumption, which was much discussed in the seventies. The work published under the title «Säkularisierung von Gesellschaft, Person und Religion. Religion und Kirche in Österreich» («Secularization of Society, Person and Religion. Religion and Church in Austria» (Freiburg, 1973)). During my studies in Konstanz I got to know the complexity of the question. I found different approaches in the writings of two great sociologists of knowledge, Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger. Berger was of the opinion that the institutions of a modern society are becoming increasingly secularized. Luckmann contradicted him: Of course, the institutions in modern societies understand each other secularly, but secularisation is not taking place. Religion merely becomes «invisible» (The invisible religion, 1969). Religion cannot disappear entirely. The end of religious transcendence would mean the end of human beings. It has already become clear that the secularisation hypothesis is closely bound to

the concept of religion. Those who as Berger does, understand religion substantively (following Rudolf Otto, for instance) and view religion as community-generating, have diagnosed deep changes in the position of religious communities in modern societies. Luckmann, however, understands religion functionally and – which has often been criticized – ultimately identifies it with being human and with the ability to transcend space and time. The sociologist Günter Dux gave me food for thought at that time in Konstanz. He regarded secularisation (only) as a category for interpreting a transformation process in the ideological dimension of society. However, interests always play a role in the interpretations that shadow generated knowledge. Who benefits from this interpretation? At that time, I discovered for myself that the secularisation hypothesis is used by those responsible in the Orthodox and Catholic Church. At a symposium in Gniezno, I witnessed how the Archimandrite Hilarion publicly asked Cardinal Kasper to fight secularisation together with the Orthodox Church.

## Meeting of experts in Berlin

At the end of the seventies I received an invitation from Peter L. Berger to a conference of the world's leading experts in sociology of religion. The following extraordinary experts were present:

- Danièle Hervieu-Léger from France. She later published about the modern forms of religion (*La religion en mouvement: le pèlerin et le converti*, 1999). In her opinion, two types of believers stand out: the pilgrim and the convert.

- Grace Davie from Great Britain was also there. She later advocated the hypothesis of a «vicarious religion». She sees it as very important to treat Europe as a special case on this issue (Europe – the exceptional

case: parameters of faith in the modern world, 2002), because religion is booming worldwide, especially in its evangelical form («Pentecostalism: The world their parish» (2002) by David Martin).

- The meeting was marked by the Israeli sociologist Smuel Eisenstadt. He presented his assumption that there are «multiple modernities» – some are compatible with religion and others not. The old formula «the more modern, the more secular» forces one to ask: Which modernity is meant here?

No one at the Congress showed unreserved sympathy for the secularisation hypothesis which dominated the 1970s.

## Empirical research of religion

Early in my life, I came via the Institute for Church Social Research in Vienna to first research the changes in church life, then the development of the ideological dimension in Europe, especially in Austria. Since 1970, in ten-year intervals, I have researched religion in the lives of Austrians (see figure).

In 1980, I was invited by Jan Kerkhofs to join the board of the EVSS. The rich data for Europe and especially for Austria fed my scientific doubts about the durability of the secularisation hypothesis, also

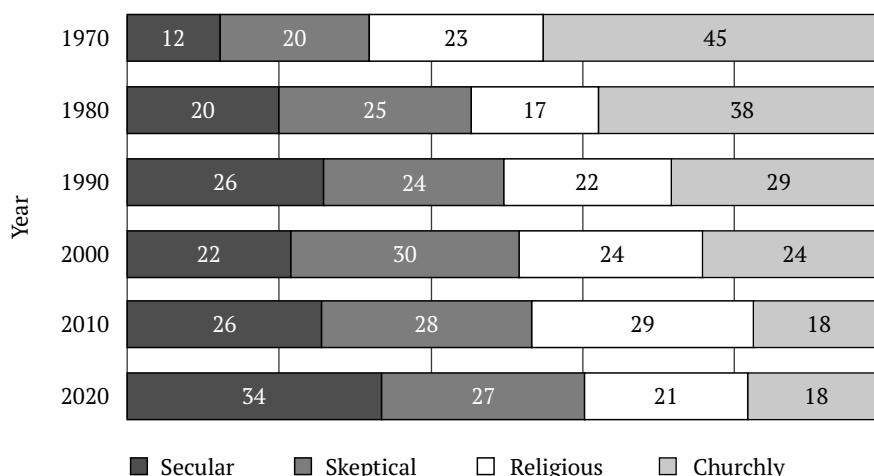
for Europe. I described the long-term development of the ideological dimension in Austrian culture over the course of half a century with the concepts of «Verbuntung» (2011) and «Wandlung» (2020). The example of Austria shows that there is no simple transition from a catholic to secularized culture. Rather, there is a colourisation, a pluralization. In all surveys, there was a colourful typology of the Churchlies, Private-Religious, Skeptics and Atheised.

## 2013 seminar in Boston

I presented these insights at a seminar in Boston in 2013. An important topic of discussion was why Europe is developing differently from the other continents. A key was seen in the aftermath of the Reformation, near to the dirty Thirty Years War. The connection bet-

ween God and violence made by the hostile denominations and their political backers had fatal consequences.

Through this war, a serious discrediting of the Christian denominations took place. The promised «Landfrieden» did not come. One consequence was pointed



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out by the Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire: He was convinced that there could only be «Landfrieden» without the hostile Christian denominations. The French atheists went a step further and thought that only a society without God could be peaceful. If one looks from this history to contemporary findings in the field of sociology of religion, one sees that manifold

variants of this thesis can be found in Europe today: church-bound peoples, private religious, atheised and, above all, skeptics.

This seminar triggered a far-reaching consequence for Peter Berger. In his last book «The many altars of modernity» (2014) he revoked his earlier secularisation theories.

### Conclusion

Finally, let me summarise my biographical experiences in a few points.

1. Ideologically monocolored cultures can only be asserted in authoritarian-totalitarian societies. The power of medieval princes, such as the absolutistic Josephinism (which was similar to tsarism in Russia), was supported, using all social and state means, by a monocoloured Catholicism, or, similarly, communist totalitarianism was enforced by a monocoloured atheism. Authoritarian-totalitarian systems make their respective worldview an inescapable fate for the peoples.

2. (Modern) liberal societies dissolve (often through silent processes) imposed (forced) worldview monopolies: this applies to Catholicism, this will predictably also be the case with the currently imposed atheism. Berger describes a shift «from fate to choice». If people choose, the probability of ideological diversity increases. Modern liberal cultures are therefore always ideologically pluralistic, they have many altars. They are multicolored, a meadow of flowers and not a monotonous sports turf.

3. What is currently interpreted as secularisation is in fact the dissolution of imposed fateful ideological monopolies (e. g. the Catholic monopoly in Austria or Bavaria). The result is the development of not mono-colored/secular, but ideologically multicoloured/pluralistic societies.

4. It may be that for (still to be researched) reasons the group of the atheised is currently growing in some European societies, while the amount of consistently believing and practicing Christians is decreasing. But

these groups are typologically on the fringes; the largest groups are the skeptics, the insecure, but also the privately-religious (Austria, 1970–2020).

5. The decrease in the category of consistently committed Christians probably also has to do with the fact that the Christian churches have for too long relied on a kind of socio-cultural self-evidence. Only with a small number has it been possible to turn culturally supported Christianity into a personal one. Religion and church hostile systems (such as Nazis or Communists) have left a valuable side effect in this respect.

6. Little research has until now been done into how atheists (who also exist in the West) interpret the world and themselves in it and what consequences they draw from it for their personal and social lives. The 2020 analyses in Austria shows that one of the greatest differences between followers and deniers of God is that they live in realities with a different span of the transcendental dimension. While the reality of those who deny God is narrowly limited in time and space, that of those who believe in God appears infinite and eternal, without spatial-temporal limitations. For some, the boundary of death is the definitive, insurmountable and inescapable end; this makes those who deny God mortals. Those who believe in God experience themselves (in the great majority) as immortals. For them death is a transition, not a downfall. The core research question is: which practical consequences follow from these two contrary definitions of reality? How do they live, shape their relationships, which political beliefs do they hold,

how do they want to die, what is their stance on the question of the protection of human life from the cradle to the grave (abortion, euthanasia)?

7. Berger formulated a still largely unexplored question in his last book. By drawing on his sociology of knowledge, developed with Luckmann, he poses the question whether people living in pluralistic societies (which have both secular and religious dimensions) might be expected to also be pluralistic in their inner being, in their consciousness. Their art of living consists of living with the different structures of relevance (Alfred Schutz) belonging to the different worlds. Since the secular realities and the religious realities are in many aspects not consistent, this creates an inner challenge for modern people to cope with both realities. This is a variation of the question how Christians under National Socialism or Communism managed to be Christians. Many people in pluralistic

cultures experience a cognitive dissonance that generates cognitive stress. But how do contemporaries live with this? This is where research begins. We can assume that there are some types of groups. Some people withdraw from the religious realm and break off all communication with a religious community. Others emigrate from the secular world and settle into sect-like groups. Others remain present in the secular world and risk cultural martyrdom. Still others demand from their own religious community to become more modern and to avoid unnecessary cognitive stress. And if religious communities are not prepared to do this, quite a few find a solution for themselves by becoming (as I already published in 1974) «Auswahlchristen», or selective Christians. And not to be forgotten are the balancers who adapt themselves with seismographic precision to the respective structure of relevance that they are currently dealing with.

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