

## Kommentar zu Willfried Spohn "Religion and Modernization in Comparative Perspective - David Martin's Theory of Secularization reconsidered"

Wohlrab-Sahr, Monika

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (1997). Kommentar zu Willfried Spohn "Religion and Modernization in Comparative Perspective - David Martin's Theory of Secularization reconsidered". In K.-S. Rehberg (Ed.), *Differenz und Integration: die Zukunft moderner Gesellschaften ; Verhandlungen des 28. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie im Oktober 1996 in Dresden ; Band 2: Sektionen, Arbeitsgruppen, Foren, Fedor-Stepun-Tagung* (pp. 459-462). Opladen: Westdt. Verl. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-138650>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

corrosive effects of socio-economic modernization combined to a large extent with ideocratic communism, but as an imposed secularism it was only partially able to destroy traditional religious communities; hence the conspicuous contemporary religious revival. Also in the industrial latecomers in Latin America secularization has been relatively weak, due to less cohesive Catholic monopoly, the development of social Catholicism and the dynamics of Protestant denominationalism. In sum, secularization is not a general consequence of industrialization, its timing and form; rather it depends on the religious activities and institution-building in the context of socio-economic modernization.

### *V. Conclusion*

This tour de force through Martin's theory of secularization could do no more than give some hints to its systematic structure and some suggestions for critical reconsideration. My hope is that this may serve as a methodological basis for more systematic historical-sociological comparative research on the complex configurations of religious change and secularization in the modern world.

### **References**

- Steve Bruce (ed.) 1992, *Religion and Modernization*, Oxford.
- Casanova, Jose 1994, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago.
- Giorgi, Liana 1992 »Religious involvement in a secularized society: an empirical confirmation of Martin's general theory of secularization,« in *Brit. Journal of Sociology* 1992: 639-659.
- Martin, David 1978, *A General Theory of Secularization*, Oxford.
- ders., 1990a, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Cambridge/Mass.
- ders., 1990b, »The Secularization Issue: Prospect and Retrospect« in *Social Compass* 37 (3), 1990: 465-474.
- Spohn, Willfried, *Religion und Klassenbildung der Arbeiterschaft im 19. Jahrhundert – Deutschland, Frankreich, Großbritannien und die USA im Vergleich* (unv. Ms.).
- ders., »Religion und Nationalismus. Osteuropa im westeuropäischen Vergleich,« in: Detlef Pollack (ed.), *Kirchen und Religionen in Osteuropa* (forthc.).

Prof. Dr. Willfried Spohn, FU Berlin, Institut für Soziologie, Babelsberger Str. 14-16, D-10715 Berlin

### **3. Kommentar zu Willfried Spohn**

*Monika Wohlrab-Sahr*

The recent debate on the concept of secularization, as raised by American and Anglo-Saxon sociologists and social historians – some of whom even claimed a paradigm shift in the sociology of religion (Warner 1993) – is not at all a new debate. This is shown best by the work of David Martin (1969) who, in his 1969 book – »The Religious and the Secular« –

called for an elimination of the concept of secularization altogether. »There is no unitary process called ›secularization‹«, he claimed, »arising in reaction to a set of characteristics labelled ›religious‹«. And he continued: »It can be shown that religious institutions bear no such common characteristics« (Martin 1969: 16). What Martin referred to at that time was mainly the ideology of *secularism*, in its manifestations of rationalism, Marxism, and existentialism. In his view these attempts to formulate »master trends« were rooted in ideological views of history, all of which he felt suffered from the poverty of historicism (Martin 1969: 2). Nine years after his original proposal to eliminate the concept of secularization, Martin (1978) published his own »general theory of secularization«, in which he (first) critiqued pre-existing secularization theory and (second) developed a new theory which attempted to avoid reproducing the theoretical difficulties of »master trend theories«. In order to do this he took into account the variety of circumstances (religious configurations, geo-political frame conditions, and socio-economic contexts) under which secularization took place. Willfried Spohn has praised Martin's attempt, but he has also added further differentiations to it.

However, I do not want to discuss the socio-historical details raised by David Martin and Willfried Spohn. I would rather try – coming from the readings of both – to raise some questions and develop some thoughts that seem important for the evaluation of the recent attack on secularization theories.

To my mind the central question is: What are we talking about when we are talking about secularization? Willfried Spohn's paper does not define explicitly what is meant by secularization, but it does suggest that it is something that can be measured in terms of its degree.

I would like to differentiate four analytical levels:

1. Is what we are talking about the »secularism« as manifested in the theories that David Martin opposed in his former work? One could consider these theories themselves as manifestations of the process of secularization, and not just as anti-religious ideologies. I would call this first level the *level of culture*.
2. Or are we talking about the decline of individual religious engagement (like membership in religious organizations, going to church, participation in rituals, spending money for religious institutions, or praying)? These are the most readily measurable indicators, and are often referred to when scholars talk about secularization. And it seems to be the easiest indicator, if one tries to distinguish certain levels of secularization (as David Martin and Willfried Spohn do). I call this second level the *individual level*.
3. Or are we talking about religious institutions? For example about the number, education, and social position of their professionals and about the impact of these institutions on different levels of society. I call this the *institutional level*.
4. This leads to my last point, which seems to be the most important in the context of a theory of secularization. To talk about a general trend of secularization always implied the declining significance of religion for the operation of the social system. I would say that the attempt to reject secularization theories also has to show that this is a wrong assumption. Here I would like to quote a polemic statement of Bryan Wilson: »Do the churches influence big business? Do business corporations regularly consult the will of

God in planning their commercial strategies or in determining the appropriate levels of profit to be sought? Is trade-union policy forged only after prayerful religious counseling? Are we to assume that the moral fibre of the Nixon, Reagan, and Bush administrations was reinforced by the White House breakfasts with Billy Graham or the televangelists? Does the British government consult the archbishop when devising social policy or does a contemporary prime minister devote to episcopal affairs even a fraction of the time which was the habit of prime ministers in the late nineteenth century? Has »*Humanae Vitae*« given pause to any government with respect to the availability of birth control appliances (Ireland, of course, always excepted)? Where is this continuing power – a power which once could define secular laws in usury, regulate the conditions of production in the guilds, and prohibit what today are normal business and commercial practices? Such was the power of religion in pre-industrial society, when monarchs were brought cringing for forgiveness to religious shrines and matters of personal morality were effectively dictated by pontifical pronouncements. Where is such power »manifestly apparent« today? « (Wilson 1992: 199f.). I call this the *level of the social system*.

By talking about a theory of secularization or by rejecting it one has to show, which of these different levels is referred to and how developments on these levels relate to each other. But, especially, one has to show the reference to the level of the social system. It might be possible, for example, that a society has a high level of individual religious activity, but in which nevertheless religious institutions have lost institutional power and the power to influence the operation of the social system.

In this vein, I will end with a remark on the comparison between the United States and Germany, to which this session was supposed to be a contribution.

Considering all these different levels, the United States would seem only in some respects to be one of the Western world's least secular nations. Obviously, there is more individual activity going on in the United States than in Germany. On this level the United States appears to be less secularized. One could add another point: In the United States religiously motivated groups are obviously more publicly visible. But, the proposition that these kinds of religious groups and institutions actually influence the operation of the social system more than in other – supposedly more secularized – countries like Germany seems at least questionable to me. One could even raise the question: Is religion in the United States not more restricted to the field of individual religiosity on the one side and to the labelling of identities of distinct ethnic groups on the other side than is the case in Germany where significant linkages exist between religious institutions, the welfare state, and public education? In this sense many Americans consider their nation to be much more secularized than Germany.

My conclusion: Let's talk about what it is that we are talking about!

### Literatur

Martin, David 1969, *The Religious and the Secular*. Studies in Secularization. N. York

Martin, David 1978, *A General Theory of Secularization*. Oxford

Wilson, Bryan R. 1992, *Reflections on a Many Sided Controversy*. In: Steve Bruce (Hg.), *Religion and Modernization*. Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis. Oxford: 195-210

Warner, R. Stephen 1993, Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States. In: *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1044-1093

Dr. Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, FU Berlin, Arnimallee 11, D-14195 Berlin

#### 4. Deregulating Religion: The Economics of Church and State

*Laurence R. Iannaccone, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark*

##### *I. Introduction*

Traditional religious research fails to recognize religion as a market phenomenon. It especially overlooks supply-side factors that shape the incentives and opportunities of religious firms, emphasizing instead demand-side shifts in the perceptions, tastes, and needs of consumers. This paper reviews the effects of government actions that alter religious supply – a longer version appears in *Economic Inquiry* 40(2), April 1997.

We find that simple deregulation lies at the root of numerous religious trends and events. America's exceptionally high levels of church attendance and Sweden's exceptionally low levels stem from the former country's competitive religious market and the latter country's state-sponsored religious monopoly. Japan's post-war shift to a free religious market led to an explosion of new religions. And the »cult phenomenon« of the 1960s and 70s had more to do with changed U.S. immigration laws than a transformed Western »consciousness.« Thus, the history of religion is strongly influenced by the structure of religious markets, and market forces continue to shape its future.

##### *II. Adam Smith's critique of established religion*

Adam Smith (1965: 740-766) laid the foundation for an economics of religion more than two hundred years ago. In a largely ignored chapter of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith argued that self-interest motivates clergy just as it does secular producers, that market forces constrain churches just as they do secular firms; and that the benefits of competition, the burdens of monopoly, and the hazards of government regulation affect religion like any other sector of the economy.

Several years ago, Iannaccone (1991) attempted a simple test of Smith's assertions using contemporary data from 17 developed, Western countries. Although the available data were relatively crude, Smith's predictions carry the day. Among Protestants, at least, church attendance and religious belief both are higher in countries with numerous competing churches than in countries dominated by a single monopoly church. The pattern is statistically significant and visually striking. Church attendance rates, frequency of prayer, belief in God, and virtually every other measure of piety are higher in countries with greater levels