

### Three main ways of analysing European societies

Hainz, Michael

Arbeitspapier / working paper

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

SSG Sozialwissenschaften, USB Köln

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Hainz, M. (2007). *Three main ways of analysing European societies*. München: Institut für Gesellschaftspolitik an der Hochschule für Philosophie München. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-346781>

#### 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.

## **Three Main Ways of Analysing European Societies**

(Michael Hainz SJ, Munich)

In this trial to help you to analyse European societies, I rather point to basic perspectives, questions and hypotheses than to detailed information and empirical proofs. This is a first limitation: The complex reality does always transcend our restrained efforts and models to catch and understand it. A second basic limit will be that I, a German Jesuit, will not be able to cope with the considerable economic, political and, especially, socio-cultural differences between European societies: My presentation will certainly be biased by my German background. I necessarily have to generalize, also in the sense that I will explain the three “ways of analysis” in a simplified, short-cut manner. The question for you will be: What is different or more specific in the concrete case of my country?

The three approaches I propose here differ from their perspective: The first will be from sociology of economy (Manuel Castells), the second from sociology of culture (Ulrich Beck), and the third from sociology of religion. This last one will be a mixed approach, as there is no single convincing approach to deal with religion in Europe – it draws from David Martin, Jose Casanova, Joerg Stolz, Steve Bruce and Ronald Inglehart.

### **1. Globalized capitalism as a motor of changes in power relations and social divisions (Manuel Castells)**

I first summarize some basic ideas of the comprehensive analysis in “The Information Age” (three volumes with altogether some 1400 pages) by Manuel Castells.<sup>1</sup> He was born in Spain, escaped under Franco to Paris, and in 1979 he was appointed a Professor of Sociology at the University of California in Berkeley, from where he studied the information technology revolution in Silicon Valley and all over the world.

#### **1.1 Which are the prime movers for the genesis of global capitalism in the information age?**

Castells traces the genesis of the current society back to three processes which took place between the end of the sixties and mid-seventies of the last century: First, a crisis of the economic development model both in capitalism and communism pushed to restructure economy. Secondly, libertarian social movements, like feminism, human rights and ecological movements claimed autonomy and experimental lifestyle and their adherents shaped a decentralized, egalitarian use of technology. Very important was, thirdly, the combination of the information technology revolution with the social form of networks: On the one hand, informationalism (the creation, processing and communication of data and new knowledge by personal computers, internet plus genetic engineering) replaced industrialism (the use of fossil fuels) as the material basis of society. On the other hand, the introduction of the new information technologies made it possible that networks (= interconnections of nodes, which de-centre performance and share decision-making) added to their traditional flexibility the new

---

<sup>1</sup>Manuel Castells: The Information Age, 3 vol., (Blackwell)1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1996-1998; Manuel Castells: Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society, in: The British Journal of Sociology 51 (2000) pp. 5-24.

ability to coordinate functions and to master complex issues, and therefore outperformed hierarchical organizations that master resources around centrally defined goals. These new information networks were an essential means for the transformation of capitalistic economies and societies, whereas the communist countries could not keep up with these new technologies. This was according to Castells a main reason for the collapse of their system.

## **1.2 Which are the fundamental features and institutions of the new economy?**

First, this new economy is informational, which means that the capacity of generating knowledge and processing information determine the productivity of all kinds of economic units.

Second, this new economy is global in the sense that its core activities have the capacities to work as a unit on the planetary scale in real time or chosen time. Core activities are financial markets, international trade of goods and services, multinational productions firms and so on. Castells clearly says that not all economy is global (there is a lot of local or regional markets), but the reach and dimension of global economy have rapidly expanded and grow in influencing economies and societies.

Third, the new economy is networked. In order to describe this feature of networking, one has to look more closely to two main institutions of this new economy, namely the network enterprise and global financial markets.

A network enterprise is centred on a business project and is made from either firms or segments of firms and/or - within firms - from several departments. Its composition and life-span correspond totally to the requirements (in terms of resources or time) of the business project. Legally and for the public, the firm (with the well-known name) remains the relevant unit; in terms of production and labour arrangements however, more and more relevant is only the fluid network of firms or part of firms. Its flexibility contributes to what Castells calls the “variable geometry of labour arrangements”.

The value of a firm, which is possibly part of several of such business projects, depends from its valuation or devaluation in the stock market. So the firm itself becomes a node in the global network of financial flows. Profits from all sources (private, institutional, entrepreneurial) converge in search of higher profits. Therefore the global financial networks are the nerve centre of informational capitalism. In this network of global financial markets by electronic means (networking of computers) space and time are - in Castell's words – „annihilated“: Distances between Hong Kong and Bratislava, New York and Rome are not relevant for the most profitable investment, and the movement of capital happens within seconds; capital is always on the move. It does not follow the market logic of supply and demand; rather more important are distortions because of computer-enacted strategic manoeuvres, crowd psychology from multi-cultural sources and unexpected turbulences, caused by ever more complex interactions on a global scale.

## **1.3 How do the relations of power and work change?**

From Castell's analysis of global capitalism follow three main consequences on the relations of power and work:

A first trend induced by globalisation, the network enterprise and information & communication facilities, is the individualization or flexibilization of the relationships of work. It turns upside down the homogeneous pattern of industrial production. Today, part-time work, temporary work, self-employment, informal or semi-formal labour arrangements, the feminization of paid labour and relentless occupational mobility are the key features of the new labour market. These individualised labour arrangements correspond to individual patterns of payment. In effect, this individualization impedes the capabilities to collectively organise the labourers. If you consider the diverging trends of the globalisation of capital, on the one hand, and of the individualization and, additionally, the regional or national restriction of labour (immigrants are intensively controlled and only in special cases admitted), on the other hand, you cannot avoid drawing the conclusion that the power resources of capital have increased, whereas the bargaining power of labour unions has structurally been weakened. One consequence for the affected individuals: Unstable labour arrangements and weak bargaining power lead to a higher level of incidence of major crises in personal and family life: temporary job loss, personal crises, illness, drugs, alcohol addiction, loss of assets, and loss of credit.

Secondly, Castell states two sorts of social divisions: (a) within labour, more and more a division into two categories becomes visible: self-programmable labour and generic labour. Self-programmable labour is equipped with the ability to retrain itself and to adapt to new tasks and new sources of information - in an environment where technology, demand and management speed up their rate of change. Generic labour, by contrast, is exchangeable and disposable, and is potentially threatened by competition with machines or other unskilled, perhaps cheaper labour (e.g., undocumented migrants). The self-programmable workers, generators of knowledge and processors of information (manager, technicians, experts), comprise about one third of OECD-societies. They do not need individual generic labour; but on the flip side, these do need the former ones in order to protect their negotiation power. This is a first fundamental cleavage in informational capitalism.

(b) Beyond the realm of employable labour, a growing portion of human beings are becoming irrelevant both as producers as consumers. Empirically, this irrelevance or factual exclusion cannot be equated with mass unemployment. Most people do work, but one has to ask: what kind of work for what kind of pay under what conditions? Millions of people are constantly in and out of paid work, often included in informal activities and also in criminal economy. The borderline between social exclusion and daily survival is increasingly blurred.

Altogether, according to Castells these developments lead to social polarisation: The intermediate layer decreases, whereas the portions on the top and on the bottom of society increase.

Thirdly, these economically induced trends of social disintegration will have more blatant effects than they would have in the past, because at the same time, the nation state in general and the welfare state (social state) in particular, are getting weaker. On one hand, the

capabilities for the national political decision-making are decreasing because of the globalisation of capital, the political multilateralism (EU, UN...) and the delegation of at least some power to lower political levels. On the other hand, the legitimacy of the state is undermined by its dependence on media politics and the politics of scandal. This weakened legitimacy and capability of national politics and social politics in particular translates into a situation where the social security net risks being thinned out or totally abandoned for those who cannot secure themselves against future crises.

#### **1.4 Normative implications, achievement potential and limits of Castells's approach**

- 1) Castell's analyses are based on broad empirical findings, both through vast personal contacts in many parts of the world and by referring to much empirical research of other scientists.
- 2) Contrary to my brief summary, Castells argues in a differentiated and balanced way.
- 3) He has a great ability to synthesize and succeeds to clearly qualify essential changes and newly emerging structures.
- 4) One can discuss Castells' neo-Marxist theoretical background: I think it is helpful in order to understand new economic structures and power relations. Castells - against Marx - points to the autonomy of cultural processes, but has no sensorial framework in order to analyse cultural and religious changes that are independent from economic or technological influences. Additionally, he argues predominantly from the macro-perspective, whereas the micro-perspective, namely the actors, the human beings with their surprising freedom and their personal limitations, are *grosso modo* neglected.

## **2. Liberty in forward or reverse gear? Individualization between societal coercion and - already decaying? - promise of redemption (Ulrich Beck)<sup>2</sup>**

I will firstly present a theorem proposed by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck who teaches in Munich and London. He started his research with a critique of class-oriented theories of social inequality and labour relations, and then also discussed gender issues, ecology and globalization. He developed his theorem of individualization in an article in 1983 and then in his book "Risikogesellschaft (risk society)", first published in 1986.

### **2.1 What does "individualization" mean?**

Individualization in Beck's sense has been kept free from the neo-liberal idea of the free-market individual, of a totally autarkic „self-entrepreneur“ who alone masters his/her life (Beck 2001: XXI). Contrary to a mere subjectivity or an „unfettered logic of action“ juggling in a virtually empty space, Beck stresses his concept of individualization as „institutionalised individualism“, a term coined by Talcott Parsons<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Beck/Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim: Individualization. Institutional Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences, London/Thousand Oaks/New Dehli (SAGE) 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Religion in Postindustrial Society. In Action, Theory and the Human Condition, New York 1978: 321.

On the one hand, individualization means the decreasing influence, the disintegration of traditional meso-social forms, e.g. class, status, gender roles, family, neighbourhood, religious milieus or, as in the Soviet bloc, state-sanctioned role-models (Beck 2001: 2). On the other hand, individualization refers to the fact that new demands, controls and constraints in modern societies (e.g., job market, welfare state) challenge individuals and offer incentives to be active, to take decisions. Beck adapts Jean-Paul Sartre's phrase: People are "condemned to individualization". Individualization, therefore is a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to stage manage, not only one's own biography, but bonds and networks surrounding it - and to do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of labour market, the education system, the welfare state and so on (Beck 2001:4): This paradoxical compulsion for everybody to live his or her own life is that which is meant by „institutionalised individualism“.

## 2.2 What are the features of the “life of one's own”?

Opportunities, dangers, biographical uncertainties that were earlier collectively predefined, tackled, opposed, endured and, possibly, changed within family, village community, religious milieu or social class, must now be perceived, interpreted, decided by individuals themselves. The consequences - opportunities and burdens alike - are shifted onto individuals. These are, in the face of complex social situations, often unable to take the necessary decisions in a properly founded way, that is: according to their true interests or morality. So, individualization does not mean „individuation“ or individually successful or „good“ life. Self-made biography also mean „broken biography“ or „failed biography“.

To summarize the characteristics of individualized conduct of life: As Beck puts it, one's personal life has to do with more personal activity (people are „condemned to activity“, to a do-it-yourself-biography), but also with the complete dependence upon macro-institutions (instead of meso-traditions). It is also characterized by an experimental style, by reflexivity, personal risk of failure, personal decisions and de-traditionalization.

I want to explain the last two aspects more deeply: (1) The emphatic ascription of self-responsibility has one serious consequence in case of societal crises: Unemployment, poverty or homelessness and other problems of this kind are no longer regarded as problems of the society, rather they are only interpreted as consequences of individual decisions. "It's me who is responsible and made a mistake", so people say, "not the society". This has two consequences: (a) Public pressure to seek, discuss and to implement political solutions might decrease. (b) If social crises are attributed as personal crises of the individual, then one can understand why individual illnesses, especially mental health problems, are so widespread. Social crises immediately hit - and hurt! - the individuals.

(2) The other statement that needs more explanation is that of de-traditionalisation. It does not mean that e.g. traditional forms of marriage or religious rituals would cease to exist. On the contrary, it might even be that they flourish more and more. No, de-traditionalisation means only that such social forms lose their character as being a „matter of course“: Instead of being

accepted in an unquestioned, normatively more or less compulsory way, they have to go through modern processes of reflection and decision-making. You can vote for traditional forms of marriage or authoritarian political convictions, but you have to argue, when e.g., asked by critical colleagues, and to decide yourself. Additionally, such “traditional” options may be propagated by modern technical means of, e.g., internet, mobile phone or techniques of marketing - see Al-Kaida.

### **2.3 Institutional framework of individualization**

As individualization means „institutionalized individualism”, Ulrich Beck considers macro-institutions as conditions of or incentives for individualization. If we compare these conditions of individualization between - let’s say - the year 1983 and today, we get an analytical tool which helps us to analyse changes in society. 1983 was both the year when Beck first published his theorem of individualization and - at least in Germany - the stage, when “welfare individualization” was more and more replaced by - what calls Beck - “individualization against the background of precarious living conditions”.

For the sixties, seventies and early eighties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we can reconstruct - each time - rising factors of individualization<sup>4</sup>: [see in appendix]

Each of these factors gives incentives that allow for or compel more individualization. Particularly important is the labour market, which Beck calls the “motor of individualization”. You have to decide a professional carrier, to stylise yourself as the best among the competitors, to prove your freedom from your local environment (mobility), to attain an adequate education which itself gives you incentives of self-reflection, et cetera. Uprooting, individualising effects were also induced in 19<sup>th</sup> century, but were then often foiled by collective labour experiences and mass protests. While these protests succeeded in the creation of the social security and social state rules, those collectivisation effects more and more vanished, and the social security systems themselves developed individualising effects: Pension insurance, e.g. „liberates“ from dependency on family ties.

What has changed in 2007, compared with 1983?

There are some minor changes: With the use of internet, e-mail and mobile phone one can presume more individualising communication effects. Leisure time and especially income tended in some Western European countries (!) - to stagnate or even decrease, thus having de-individualising effects; the opposite development has started in Eastern Europe

Some new contextual factors have to be added: Intensified economic globalisation, security concerns and a rising consciousness for global ecological problems will certainly influence individualization, maybe - altogether - negatively: On the one hand, we can clearly state that due to globalised competition in the product and labour markets, individualising impulses have certainly increased. Perhaps more important is, however, that welfare-state regulations have been reduced in the last decade. If one adds the rising consciousness of ecological problems

---

<sup>4</sup> Michael Hainz: Dörfliches Sozialleben und Individualisierung, Bonn 1999: 18.

and security concerns (the - so defined - “war against terrorism”, which disguises the US-American struggle for oil and political domination), one can expect - and already perceive - a more collective cultural move: In situations of perceived danger people tend to join communities for security reasons. Already control cameras have gained more legitimacy than the right of informational self-determination. Is there or will there even be a even much stronger trend to collectivisation? Beck himself argues - only partly convincingly, I think - that one has to take serious the already attained level of individualization: Today individuals will create or access groups and institutions not in a traditional, pre-scripted way, but with high claims on their own, free decision-making - this would mean a voluntary, freely chosen access to institutions and a liberal regime „within“them.

## **2.4 Why has individualization become so important?**

Why has “individualization” become a key word of present modernity? What are the reasons that, as Beck writes, “the ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement is the most powerful current in the modern world” (2001: 22)?

Beck rejects explanations which trace this growth of individual striving back to individual will or, negatively, to egoism. Instead of such an individual ascription, Beck refers to a structural reason: to the high level of functional differentiation in the present society. Present society, according also to his argument, breaks down into separate functional spheres, e.g. economy, politics, science, education, mass media and so on with all their subdivisions. “People are integrated into society only in their partial roles as taxpayers, car drivers, students, consumers, voters, patients, producers, fathers, pedestrians. Constantly changing between different, partly incompatible logics of action, they are forced to take into hands that which is in danger of breaking into pieces: their own lives” (2001: 23). Thus individualization emerges from the structurally produced free spaces which an ever more differentiated society has opened up.

Another explanation refers to systems theory: Modern society has to deal with such complex and quickly changing situations that restrictive, detailed rules become obsolete and have to be replaced by abstract media (money, law) which impose a certain incentive to act upon a “generously limited” field of action which requires therefore that the actors themselves use their individual liberty in order to duly correspond to these circumstances. Individualization is so understood as a modern form of social control. Interestingly, its unpleasant character of “control” is concealed and “out-maneuvered” by the highly esteemed cultural value of liberty: It’s you, the individual, who feels free by, at the same time, “socially” controlling yourself and your actions according the requests of society!<sup>5</sup>

An even more critical explanation of the vast interest in individualization looks at its ideological connotations. As Beck's counterpart Karl Otto Hondrich<sup>6</sup> has put it: Individualization has become so popular because it contains a ”component of redemption”: Persons, who felt so restricted and sick within family, village or class traditions, saw

---

<sup>5</sup>Cornelia Hahn: Soziale Kontrolle und Individualisierung. Zur Theorie moderner Ordnungsbildung, Opladen 1995.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Otto Hondrich: Zur Dialektik von Individualisierung und Rückbindung am Beispiel der Paarbeziehung, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (48 Jg.) 1998, B 53/98, S. 3-8.



individualization as a promise of liberation. So individualization has become more a religious term than a social scientific one - according to Hondrich.

## **2.5 Strengths and limits of Beck's approach**

Positively, one can say that the theorem of individualization is a helpful concept in order to better understand modern attitudes to life and a lot of changes e.g. in family life, community patterns or religious bricolage. Professional sociologists acknowledge Beck's innovative function to open up new, more adequate concepts of sociology, but they criticize his lack of both empirical data and theoretical accurateness. Poverty researchers attack him for unduly overstressing the special habits of the educated middle-class to the whole society

From my point of view, his theorem of individualization is a great challenge to theology, because he combines of true description of modern life conditions, an earthly promise of redemption and a restrained idea of human being, which is not open to transcendence. Sociologically, I only mention two problems: (1) Beck systematically underestimates the meso-level (e.g. social movements). (2) With regard to the central importance of complex individual decision-making, Beck only looks in the direction of more individual options which he generally values too positively. He overlooks what Ralf Dahrendorf<sup>7</sup> has called - in German - „Ligaturen“, which means bonds, values, cultural priorities that are necessary conditions in order to decide between different options. Lack of such culturally-based criteria means that (most) contemporaneous European societies are located like in an untouched desert: Practically all directions are open to be chosen, but there are not enough indications, which help to find the proper way.

Today, because of a new reflectivity on such orientations for decision-making and because of structural reasons (reduced welfare state, ecology, security concerns) I think that we - at least in Germany and other Western European countries - have already exceeded the zenith of individualization and are now in a backward movement: Options are getting closed or even less estimated, whereas aspects of belonging, values, criteria of “good life” et cetera are more looked for.

## **3. Breakdown of traditional religiosity, new spiritual longing, strong “brands” in competition and persistent secularization: on diverse religious landscapes in Europe**

I organize this part by first mentioning historical factors for the religious diversity between European countries, and then looking at actual religious trends in three steps: Which phenomena do we perceive? How do we interpret these? What do their causes tell about present society?

### **3.1 Which historical factors differentiate between European countries and regions?**

More than in economic or political spheres, we find a plurality in matters of religion in Europe.

---

<sup>7</sup> Lebenschancen. Anläufe zur sozialen und politischen Theorie“, Frankfurt (Suhrkamp)1979.

Following the concepts of David Martin<sup>8</sup>, a British sociologist of religion, I hint at some historical categories, which altogether determine the religious vitality in a given country or regional situation. Martin always asks what crucial historical events have shaped religion in a given country or region. To summarise his arguments:

- The reaction to the Reformation: Protestant countries are, as a rule, comparatively more secularized than catholic ones, but:
- the kind of relation between political power and religion: Strong alliances between the throne and altar were always negative for religion (see, e.g., the revolutions in France and in Russia, and the state churches in Scandinavia). Former alliances between the throne and altar were the more negative for religion, the more radicals had to fight against a monolithic society, which was hold together by communitarian catholic or orthodox denominational bonds - whereas protestant societies let more room for pluralistic dissent, so avoiding disastrous fights against a whole state-church-complex;
- the degree of religious monopolies vs. competition: Competitive, entrepreneurial church situations are more vital than monopolistic ones regulated by the state;
- the relation between nation and religion: Where religion has acted as „cultural defence“ (Steve Bruce), as in Ireland, Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, it has been strong;
- the power of secularized elites to penetrate society, e.g. by education (more in French than in Turkey);
- the geographic location: Peripheries (nations at the border to other civilisations like Greece or Poland) are more pious than centres .

### 3.2 Which actual trends of religious phenomena do we perceive?

I sketch three major trends in nowadays religious development in Europe:

(1.) Processes of **shrinking traditional, Church-related religiosity**, namely a melting of previously closed strong denominational milieus and reductions in religious vocations, church membership, sacramental or prayer practices and beliefs. Please note that this „negative“ trend has exceptions, as we will see later, and it is not the only one, though for many the most painful one.

(2.) Phenomena of **more or less persistent secularity**:

a) Milieu-research shows that considerable parts of the generation “1968”, of the looser-milieu of the “disconnected precariate”<sup>9</sup>, of the high establishment and of the young cultural avant-garde, are “religious illiterates”.

b) Surprisingly, elderly people also show unexpected high level of religious doubts.

c) Atheist tendencies are most clearly marked in certain geographical areas, e.g., East Germany, Czech republic and Estonia.

---

<sup>8</sup> On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory, Aldershot a.o.(Ashgate) 2005

<sup>9</sup> Geo Neugebauer: Politische Milieus in Deutschland. Die Studie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn (Dietz) 2007. He speaks of the “abgehängte Prekariat”.

d) The most important subsystems of society do, according to their self-understanding, not need „external“ religious legitimization, correction or supplement. Economy and science (especially biology and neural-sciences) seem to be most reluctant, but also the other subsystems (politics, media, arts) show a great self-assurance and less and less respect for traditional church (status)- positions.

e) We can also notice some sort of church-produced secularity, e.g. as results of sex-scandals (e.g. Ireland, Austria), of authoritarian church government (e.g. the dioceses of Chur and Ratisbon) or because of lack of respect to the faithful by priests (e.g. sometimes in Poland).

**(3.) A new emergence of religious symbols, practices and issues, which are multilayered:**  
Is this a new religious springtime? Let's differentiate seven developments:

(a) Religious topics and symbols get more visible in the cultural sphere: in vanguard theatres, as new religious impartiality in lyrics and novels, in the growing number of books on angels, as main trend in modern films - from “Superman returns” to Mil Gibson’s “Passion of Christ”.<sup>10</sup>

(b) In marketing and the presentation of consumer goods, religious symbols are often intentionally used: “Put on your Nike-shoes, because here is holy ground” (after: Exodus 3,5).

(c) In remarkable parts of philosophy (e.g. Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, philosophy of religion), psychology (e.g., new, religiously positive interpretation of Sigmund Freud’s intentions) and even sociology (e.g., José Casanova, Hans Joas) we find religiously more open or even committed religious positions.

(d) Religion and how to cope with religion have become “hot issues” in proceedings at law and in the media - the more religion has to do with conflict and the more it looks like exotic.

(e) For more than twenty years we find neo-spiritual scenes at the edge or outside of Christianity. Esoteric movements may be of less public interest now, but “spirituality” (often instead of “religion”!) has become very influential in its aspirations and social forms: People long for “deeper”, touching experiences; they make spiritual experiments in privatised, fluid social settings. As „pilgrims“ they consequently follow their own individual spiritual way and are more unscrupulous than ever as they cross borders of religious systems.

(f) Other world religions are now more visible and influential within Europe: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Pentecostal churches and African religious groups. They are most frequently religions of immigrants, but are also induced by marriages, tourism, and other forms of conversions of locals.

(g) Also within European Christianity we find trends of new religious vitality: at mega-events (World youth days, visits of the pope), in strong pious, relatively conservative or even authoritarian, „brands“ (some new religious orders or spiritual movements), but also in profiled pastoral settings (e.g., „youth churches“, city-pastoral, work with artists, online-retreats,

---

<sup>10</sup> For Germany, see: Herderkorrespondenz Spezial Oktober 2006: Renaissance der Religion - Mode oder Megatrend?

“retreats on the roads”, new religious open-door offers, contemplation courses, new missionary activities).

### 3.3 How to interpret this new visibility of religious symbols and actors?

(1) Epistemologically, the situation is much more open than decades before: People accept as true more of that which transcends reason.

(2) But be careful: Partially the boom of that which looks like “religion” is in fact not a strengthening, but a weakening of the religious. This can be said at least in two cases:

(a) The fact, that religious symbols are more frequently used in advertisements and in films is indeed a signal that „religion sells“; but often it can at the same time substantially weaken religion, because it de-constructs contents and forms of traditional religion, whose representation does not any more follow a religious logic, but mainly an economic or only an aesthetic one.

(b) Also, the more frequent public appearance of religious issues cannot be equated with growing religious convictions and practices, because it often comes from an outside, third-person-perspective and derives from non-religious motives, e.g, for fear of conflicts attributed to “the” Islam, or in the instrumental intention to mobilise moral resources of religion against undesired societal developments (e.g., cloning of humans). Also, empirically, there is – till now – only scarce evidence, that the new visibility of religious symbols translates into increases of religious practices and beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

(3) Similarly, the new impartiality of the religious in art follows partly from the fact that the churches have lost control of this field.

(4) At a majority of people who call themselves “religious” or “spiritual” today - except from the very committed or even fundamentalist part - religiosity differs from that fifty years ago and is, measured in traditional terms, weaker than their older counterparts:

(a) Religious socialisation today is less deep and less effectively „imprints“the whole life.

(b) More important than dogma and morals is religious feeling: You have to be touched - in soul and body.

(c) The link between religious beliefs on the one hand and behaviour, especially social behaviour, on the other hand, has considerably weakened: “Spirituality” nowadays often goes together without any interest in justice.

(5) Altogether, more than just a simple comeback of traditional religion, a patchy, inconsistent mix of contemporary religiousness emerges. This pluralisation will amplify, also due to demography. It will also politically get (more) radicalised, where religious divisions and socio-economic exclusions overlap and massively reinforce themselves.

---

<sup>11</sup> New religious vitality is indicated in: Yves Lambert: A Turning Point in Religious Evolution in Europe: in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 19 (2004) 29-45 (increased, also Church related, religiosity of the young generation), and in: Paul Michael Zulehner: *Wiederkehr der Religion?* In: Denz, H. (ed.): *Die europäische Seele. Leben und Glauben in Europa*, Wien (Czernin) 2002: 23-41 (increased religiosity in some urban, metropolitan areas).

### 3.4 How to explain this religious landscape? From religion back to society

If we analyse the causes for central developments of the contemporary religious landscape, we do at the same time interpret important features of our European societies. But what are, in the sociology of religion, the central questions in need of explanation? I suggest the following one: How to explain the simultaneous phenomena of new religious interest and persistent secularity?

Starting from the latter aspect, I refer to Jose Casanova's fascinating book „Public Religions in the Modern World“ (1994), and especially to the first of his three theses on secularisation: This thesis of functional differentiation means the emancipation of the mundane spheres of economy, politics, science, art etc from Church influence and their growing autonomy, which in its consequences (namely the separation between the mundane and the religious and the successful functioning of the mundane spheres) is still a main practical problem for religious persons today – in spite of the helpful theological insights at Vatican II in *Gaudium et spes* 36 and 76.

Deepening the differentiation-argument from a micro-perspective, Joerg Stolz (Lausanne, Switzerland) has recently argued that now an extensive range of secular competitors (from welfare state to wellness industry and ritual entrepreneurs et cetera) offers more reliable and more effective immanent and, so the perception by some, also transcendent goods than those having been or actually being offered by the Church, thus leading to extensive secularising effects.

But, at the same time, functional differentiation is also “religiously productive”: It has liberated religious actors (e.g. bishops, abbots) from economic and political functions, so strengthening their specific religious role. The question, however, arises, whether we have or had somehow lost the key for this religious logic. We may also ask whether the long-standing concentration on these emancipated, autonomous mundane spheres has caused a new religious longing: Has modernity itself become religiously productive? This brings me directly to the first aspect of my question, namely how to explain the new interest in religion. I suggest some hypotheses:

(1) On a deep cultural level one might speak of a **disillusion with the promises of modernity** (see the critique of postmodernism or by Jürgen Habermas who speaks of “*entgleisender Modernisierung*” [“slipping up of modernization”]). There is an ongoing controversy on how our developed societies take up position with regard to Modernity and the Enlightenment.

(2) On a more concrete level, one can, in the line of the argument of Norris and Inglehart<sup>12</sup>, argue that **rising insecurities** (e.g. risks of unemployment, divorce, dismantling of the welfare state) foster a more extensive look for stable religious anchor. As middle classes at risk have much to loose, it is them, who more than others look for spirituality and religious “protection”.

(3) A similar direction is supposed in Ralf Dahrendorf’s **desert-argument** (see above): The new openness for religion can be understood as a trial to cope with that dilemma of modernity that we endlessly have to take decisions but lack of criteria for that.

---

<sup>12</sup> Sacred and secular : religion and politics worldwide, Cambridge [u.a.] (Cambridge Univ. Press) 2004.

(4) Another concrete side-effect of modernity: **Vis-à-vis the routine, one-dimensionality, shallowness and rationality of modernity (everyday work, consume, media...), the wish of re-enchantment** (“Wiederverzauberung”, the reverse of Max Weber’s argument) may grow: The longing for spirituality as a counter-effect of the rationalised modernity. Insofar as the Church is perceived as a rationalized, non-spiritual bureaucracy (often persons looking for meditation and prayer, do not find priests who are able to show them how to pray and to guide them spiritually!), the de-institutionalisation from church can partly be interpreted as a rejection of this disliked aspect of modernity.

(5) Approaches of **globalisation and religious economics**: Side effects of globalisation, like migration, tourism and internet, make available new religious ideas and new religious actors (e.g. Buddhists, Moslems, Pentecostal entrepreneurs). The more numerous religious suppliers are in a given market, the more they try hard to offer attractive religious activities: In the end, religiosity and spirituality will get more vital - so the essence of this argument, brought forward by Rodney Stark, Roger Finke, Laurence Iannacone and others. There is certainly a new competition between religions in Europe, but I join those sociologists of religions (Steve Bruce, Joerg Stolz) who criticise a non-reflected religious use of economic concepts like “markets” and “goods”. No colonisation of religion by means of economics!

## Appendix: Factors of Individualization (see p. 6)

