Part III

Systematic Perspectives

Interreligious Dialogue as a Response to Processes of Secularization

A New Perspective on the World's Parliament of Religions

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Abstract

This article proposes secularization theory as a tool to better understand the rationale of IRD-activities. To make this point, it starts with a review of present-day secularisation theories. On this basis, the article presents an analysis of the concept of the secular used in the context of the so-called '1893 – World's Parliament of Religions'. In a final step, the author argues that IRD-activities have to be understood on the basis of an implicit juxtaposition of 'the religious' and 'the secular'. They try to present a 'religious voice' as a response to a context perceived as being secular.

Keywords

interreligious dialogue – religious studies – Europe – secularization theory

1 Introduction: Beyond the Pluralization-Paradigm

As put forward in the introduction to the present volume, academic debates on interreligious dialogue (IRD) activities have long been dominated by references to concepts of religious plurality and pluralization.¹ For decades, researchers have been approaching dialogue as a tool to deal with the challenges they connect to the presence of different religious traditions within a specific socio-cultural context.² And also the more recent strands of IRD-research tend to conceptualize the respective activities within the framework of pluralization theories, focusing upon the encounters or the relationships between multiple religious actors – individual and/or collective.³

The paper at hand wants to invite its readers to move away from this pluralization approach and to explore the heuristic potential of another major paradigm in the academic study of religion. More to the point, it will argue that present-day secularization theories are crucial to understand IRD-activities within European societies. To do so, the paper will be structured around two very broad questions:

- The first question is an empirical one: Are there any references to secularization and ‘the secular’ within the context of IRD-activities – and if so, how are they constructed?
- The second question will be more systematic: To what extent do the more recent contributions to secularization theory help to better understand present-day IRD-activities in Europe?

To discuss these two questions, the article will narrow their scope and focus on three aspects: It will start with a look at the more recent debates on the concept of secularization (2). On this basis, the paper will then have a look at the idea of ‘the secular’ within the context of the so-called ‘1893-World’s Parliament of Religions’ – in short: ‘the Parliament’ (3). It closes with indications to selected national papers of the present volume and questions for future research (4).

2 The Concept of ‘the Secular’ in Present-Day Research

The increasing influence of theories of pluralization on the Academic Study of Religion is a rather recent phenomenon. For decades, secularization theory

1 Weisse/Amirpur/Körs/Vieregge, *Religions and Dialogue*.

2 Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*; Forward, *A Short Introduction to Inter-religious Dialogue*; Eck, *A New Religious America*.

3 Iwuchukwu, *Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria*; Sinn, *Religiöser Pluralismus im Werden*; Nagel, *Religious Pluralization and Interfaith Activism in Germany*.

has probably been the most influential analytic approach to understand the role of religion in modern societies. At least within the Social Sciences it is possible to reconstruct a long and influential history of secularization theories starting with Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, or Emile Durkheim and leading up to modern classics such as Jean Baubérot and Philippe Portier, Detlef Pollack, or Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart.⁴ Within their varied theoretical contexts, all these authors have been arguing for a fundamental tension between modernization processes and religion as well as a decrease of religious significance within modern societies.⁵

Throughout the last few decades, this classic version of secularization theory has – however – been confronted with a number of critical inquiries – most prominently by theorists of pluralization such as Peter L. Berger or Thomas Luckmann as well as Rodney Stark or Grace Davie (to be discussed in greater detail later on in the present article). These challenges have provoked a productive widening of the concept of secularization. And it is exactly such a more profound version of secularization theory that might be helpful to further advance our understanding of IRD-activities. Consequently, some of these critical voices have to be heard in order to understand the present argument:

2.1 *Initial Critiques of Secularization Paradigm*

First and foremost, the sociology of knowledge in the tradition of Thomas Luckmann looks back to a substantial tradition of critical readings of secularization theory. Starting from Luckmann's famous essay on the 'invisible religion',⁶ its protagonists have been questioning the very concept of secularization by arguing that classic secularization theories are based upon a notion of religion that is too narrow. They propose that experiences of transcendence (little, intermediate and great) form an integral part of the *conditio humana* and that the very idea of a secularization process should thus be obsolete.⁷

During the late 1990s and early 2000s scholars such as Rodney Stark and Martin Riesebrodt have added further dimensions to this fundamental criticism.⁸ And most famously, Peter L. Berger – in his 1999-publication entitled 'The Desecularization of the World' – has made the point that secularization theory has actually turned out to be wrong:

4 Baubérot/Portier/Willaime, *La Sécularisation en Question*; Chaves, *American Religion*; Norris/Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*.

5 For a re-construction of these debates, see Calhoun/Juergensmeyer/VanAntwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*; Asad, *Formations of the Secular*.

6 Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*.

7 Knoblauch, *Religionssoziologie*; Schnettler/Szydlík/Pach, *Religiöse Kommunikation und weltanschauliches Wissen*.

8 Stark/Finke, *Acts of Faith*, esp. pp. 57–81; Riesebrodt, *Die Rückkehr der Religionen*.

The idea [of the secularization paradigm] is simple: Modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals. And it is precisely this key idea that has turned out to be wrong. To be sure, modernization has had some secularizing effects, more in some places than others. But it has also provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization. Also, secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness.⁹

Berger's position has become highly influential and documents three crucial dimensions of the academic debates on the concept of secularization around the turn of the 21st century. First, it reflects the persistent embeddedness of secularization theory within the context of a theory of modernization. Second, the quotation depicts the conviction that a rather simplistic idea of secularization has long dominated the debates on religion within the social sciences. And third, Berger concludes from the first two observations a need for a fundamental re-orientation in the analysis of religion that moves away from traditional secularization theory.

On this basis, critics of secularization theories have begun to develop a more complex perspective on processes of secularization. Such a call for nuances has already been part of the narrative that came to the fore during the second half of the 1990s. Despite its paradigmatic aspirations, the quotation from Peter L. Berger still acknowledges the existence of secularization processes. Actually, Berger's wider argument can be read as an appeal for a modification of secularization theory in the light of more recent processes of globalization rather than its fundamental resolution. In particular, however, the work of David Martin and José Casanova has added further momentum to these discussions. And these are the debates that set the stage for the following considerations.

2.2 *Call for further Nuances*

David Martin and José Casanova both underline the significance of social differentiation as the core of secularization theories. David Martin made the point that arguably, "social differentiation offered the most useful element in the paradigm of secularization."¹⁰ Along those lines, he highlighted four distinct – yet entwined – patterns of secularization in Europe: (a) the relationship to the enlightenment, (b) the monopolistic position of religious traditions,

9 Berger, *The Desecularization of the World*, pp. 2 et seq.

10 Martin, *Sociology, Religion and Secularization*, p. 20.

(c) the perception of national enemies and (d) the position of a country in terms of center and periphery.¹¹ And José Casanova made the point that a global theory of secularization has to distinguish at least three historically contingent dimensions – (a) the process of social differentiation, (b) the process of privatization, and (c) the process of a declining social significance of religion.¹²

Within this context, the last decade has seen two fundamental shifts of the academic debates that have further enhanced the state of the art of present-day secularization theory: First, secularization theory itself has undergone a process of further historicization and differentiation. To give but a few eminent examples: Karl Gabriel and Christel Gärtner, and Detlef Pollack have taken up the criticism of the 1990s questioning the over-all heuristic potential of generalizing concepts of secularization and asking for further historicization.¹³ Parallel to this, scholars such as Steven Bruce and Jörg Stolz have underlined the need to add further nuances to the notion of secularization, while still emphasizing the persistent importance of the concept for empirical research.¹⁴

Second, the critics of traditional secularization theories have also proposed to further nuance the concept. Scholars such as Linda Woodhead have suggested to re-configure the concept of ‘the secular’ in a way that underlines the interdependencies between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’.¹⁵ Based upon multifold analyses of the role of religion in post-war Great Britain, she argues that processes of secularization cannot be assessed without taking religion into consideration and that ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ are closely entwined. Another example for this trend would be the work at the Humanities Center for Advanced Studies ‘Multiple Secularities’ that investigates the relationships between religion and other social spheres in multifold areas and regions.¹⁶

To put it in a nutshell: The most recent debates around the concept of secularization move away from the idea of a simple paradigm shift (from secularization to pluralization) in the study of religion. They rather work towards more complex and heuristically challenging concepts of ‘the secular’. And this is exactly the idea that will form the basis of the following considerations. In line with David Martin and José Casanova, they will take processes of social differentiation as the analytic core of their concept of secularization. On this

11 Martin, *Sociology, Religion and Secularization*, p. 20, p. 22.

12 Casanova, *Public Religions Revisited*.

13 Gabriel/Gärtner/Pollack, *Umstrittene Säkularisierung*; Pollack, *Rückkehr des Religiösen?*

14 Bruce, *Secularization*; Stolz/Könemann/Schneuwly Purdie/Engelberger/Krüggeler, *Religion und Spiritualität in der Ich-Gesellschaft*.

15 Woodhead, *Introduction*; Martin/Catto, *The Religious and the Secular*.

16 Burchardt/Wohlrab-Sahr/Middell, *Multiple Secularities beyond the West*; Lehmann, *Analyse der Grenzstreifen des religiösen Feldes*.

basis, they follow Linda Woodhead as well as Gabriel/Gärtner/Pollack and rely upon a model of secularization that underlines the contingent relationship between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’.

Within this wider frame of reference, the next section will argue that such a differentiated take on secularization theory opens new perspectives for the analysis of IRD-activities – that move beyond pluralization theories.¹⁷ This will be exemplified with data drawn from a case that is of particular significance for the study of IRD: The 1893-World’s Parliament of Religions (in short: ‘the Parliament’).

3 The Idea of ‘the Secular’ within the Context of the 1893-‘Parliament’

The case of the 1893-World’s Parliament of Religions has primarily been chosen because the ‘Parliament’ is widely perceived as one of the central events in the more recent history of modern IRD-activities. In 2010, Peter L. Berger argued: “The contemporary eruption of interreligious dialogue might be dated from the World’s Parliament of Religions which met in Chicago in 1893, where among other notable events [the Hindu-philosophy of] Vedanta first made a strong impression in the West.”¹⁸ Along the same lines, Anna Halafoff also described the ‘Parliament’ as one of the starting points of what she characterizes as the ‘modern multifaith movement’.¹⁹ And there are many other analyses that point towards a similar direction.²⁰

The ‘Parliament’ is also among the most extensively published events that have shaped IRD-activities. At the time, its organizers used state of the art modern media – around the turn of the 20th century these were primarily the most recent methods of book-printing – to popularize the event. In 1893, John Henry Barrows published a two-volume ‘Popular and illustrated History of the World’s first Parliament of Religions’. One year later, Walter R. Houghton published the five-volumes ‘Neely’s History’ of the Parliament.²¹ Together with a significant amount of media coverage, these publications provide us with

17 Lehmann/Jödicke, *Einheit und Differenz in der Religionswissenschaft*.

18 Berger, *Dialog zwischen religiösen Traditionen in einem Zeitalter der Relativität*, p. 46, p. 48.

19 Halafoff, *The Multifaith Movement*.

20 Seager, *The World’s Parliament of Religions*; Lüddeckens, *Das Weltparlament der Religionen von 1893*.

21 Barrows, *The World’s Parliament of Religions*; Houghton, *Neely’s History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World’s Columbian Exposition*.

rather detailed data on the 'Parliament' – even though they are heavily edited and the main archives of the 'Parliament' were destroyed by a fire in 1923.²²

On this basis, a closer look at one of the central speeches of the 'Parliament' (in an edited and printed version) will help to better understand the heuristic potential of a nuanced concept of secularization for the analysis of IRD-activities. The respective text will be John Henry Barrows' Address as the Chairman of the General Committee to the first meeting of the 'Parliament' – on 11 September, 1893.

3.1 *John Henry Barrows' Initial Address*

Barrows' Address in a way set the stage for the whole 'Parliament'. At first sight, it hereby documents the implicit rules of the genre of an initial address as well as Barrows' linguistic style as a Presbyterian clergyman around the turn of the 20th century. Right at the beginning, Barrows solemnly welcomes the participants of the 'Parliament' and underlines its global dimensions. In the 'Popular and Illustrated History' this reads:

Welcome, most welcome, O wise men of the East and the West! May the star which has led you hither be like that luminary which guided the sages of old, and may this meeting by the inland sea of a new continent be blessed of heaven to the redemption of men from error and from sin and despair. I wish you to understand that this great undertaking, which has aimed to house under one friendly roof in brotherly council the representatives of God's aspiring and believing children everywhere, has been conceived and carried on through strenuous and patient toil, with an unfaltering heart, with a devout faith in God, and with most signal and special evidences of his divine guidance and favor. (p. 73)

And the Address continues along those lines. On the one hand, Barrows presents the very general layout of the whole event and invites the participants to take part in its multifold plenary meetings, study groups etc. On the other hand, he stresses the significance of the event as a meeting of religious men and women. And in these passages, the Address certainly documents a significant awareness of religious plurality as well as a rather distinct assessment of processes of pluralization. It is – however – interesting to see that the Address constructs the results of the processes of religious pluralization in a very specific way.

22 Mouzzouri, *A Symbol for Interreligious Dialogue*.

3.2 *The Initial Address as a Document or Religious Plurality*

As far as the level of simple linguistics is concerned, the letter-sequence 'plural' is only used four times in the first volume of the 'Popular and Illustrated History', and none of the respective references come from Barrows' Address. The letter-sequence that is more frequently used refers to the concept of diversity. The letter-sequence 'divers' can be found on 35 occasions – more or less equally spread over volume one of Barrows' 'History of the Parliament'. On almost all of these occasions, the letter-sequence refers to the concept of diversity (diversity, diverse, diversified etc.). In only one case it refers to the concept of 'diversion' (page 110). And the concept of diversity is most frequently used to describe 'religions', 'faiths', 'doctrines', 'churches' etc. But once again, Barrows himself does not use this concept at all.

As far as the Initial Address is concerned, the idea of plurality is rather constructed in two entwined ways: enumerations and/or the usage of plural constructions. And these types of juxtaposition run throughout the whole document. To give a first example: Barrows' Initial Address begins with an emphasis on the general significance of the meeting that is about to begin: "Mr. President and Friends, – If my heart did not overflow with cordial welcome at this hour, which promises to be a great moment in history, it would be because I had lost the spirit of manhood and had been forsaken by the Spirit of God."²³ Immediately following this initial phrase, Barrows describes the pluralist setup of the meeting in the following words:

The whitest snow on the sacred mount of Japan, the clearest water springing from the sacred fountains of India are not more pure and bright than the joy of my heart and of many hearts here that this day has dawned in the annals of time, and that, from the farthest isles of Asia; [sic] from India, mother of religions; from Europe, the great teacher of civilization; from the shores on which breaks the 'long wash of Australasian seas'; that from neighboring lands and from all parts of this republic, which we love to contemplate as the land of earth's brightest future, you have come here at our invitation in the expectation that the world's first Parliament of Religions must prove an event of race-wide and perpetual significance.²⁴

Once again, this quotation is very much shaped by Barrows' individual, rhetorical style. Apart from this, it documents the global perspective of the 'Parliament's' organizers as well as the evolutionary underpinnings of their

²³ Barrows, *Address of Chairman John Henry Barrows of the General Committee*, p. 72.

²⁴ Barrows, *Address of Chairman John Henry Barrows of the General Committee*, p. 72.

construction of the world. In the quotation, the world is divided into different spheres ('Asia', 'Europe', 'Australasia'), characterized by different contributions to the evolution of civilization (in the singular) and religions (in the plural).

As far as the underlying notion of religious plurality is concerned, the quotation documents that religious plurality is – within this wider framework of civilizing evolution – constructed as the parallel existence of different religious-cultural traditions. Whereby, it has to be mentioned that Barrows (in contrast to other authors of the time) does not weight the significance of those multiple contributions to 'the evolution of civilization'. He distinguishes between the location of the different contributions in time and space. He does not distinguish in terms of their proposed significance for socio-cultural evolution.

And this concept of plurality as the juxtaposition of different religious traditions actually runs through the whole Address. It also forms, for example, the basis of Barrows' references to what could be described as his *in nuce* concept of Interreligious Dialogue:

It is perfectly evident to illuminated minds that we should cherish loving thoughts of all peoples and humane views of all the great and lasting religions, and that whoever would advance the cause of his own faith must first discover and gratefully acknowledge the truths contained in other faiths.²⁵

Similar to the previous quote, this sequence also constructs the plurality of religions in terms of juxtaposition. The mode of the relationships between 'loving thoughts' and 'humane views' is that of 'acknowledgement', it is not focusing upon further debate or interaction. And this should be evident – as Barrows puts it – to 'illuminated minds'. Whereby, Barrows leaves it open as to where this state of mind can be found – only among co-religionists or also among other people, too.

In sum, this first reading of the Initial Address shows that Barrows' speech does not set out to discuss the very concept of plurality. (And arguably the Initial Address of a conference would not be the appropriate place to do so.) He rather constructs plurality, in an implicit way, as a juxtaposition of different but equal parts. In this sense, the Initial Address can be interpreted as a document of religious pluralization within the context of the United States of America around 1900.

This is, however, only one part of the story. To further develop the aims of the present article, it is now necessary to contrast this construction of religious

²⁵ Barrows, *Address of Chairman John Henry Barrows of the General Committee*, p. 75.

plurality with Barrows' reference to concepts of secularity and learn more about the relationship between these two concepts in the text. To make this comparison, it is once again helpful to distinguish between explicit and implicit references to 'the secular'.

3.3 *Explicit References to 'the Secular' in the Initial Address*

As far as explicit references to 'the secular' are concerned, the results of the analysis are actually similar to the analysis of the explicit references to 'plurality'. We can find only one specific mention of 'the secular' within Barrows' whole Address. In the course of the acknowledgement section, he refers – almost in passing – to the 'secular press':

Let me, however, give my heartiest thanks to the devout women who, from the beginning, have championed the idea of this Parliament and worked for its realization; [sic] to the President of the Columbian Exposition and his associates; to the President of the World's Congress Auxiliary, whose patient and Titanic labors will one day be appreciated at their full value; to the Christian and secular press of our country, which has been so friendly and helpful from the start; to the more than three thousand men and women upon our Advisory Council in many lands ...²⁶

For the present argument, this quotation is – nevertheless – of three-fold significance: First and foremost, the very fact that there has only been one explicit reference to the concept of the secular within the Initial Address illustrates that Barrows did not perceive the 'Parliament' as a space to challenge secular beliefs, organizations or discourses. The 'Parliament' is not constructed as an enterprise to criticize for example liberalism or natural sciences. Second, it is interesting to see that of all things, the press is the only social actor, Barrows characterizes – at least in part – as being secular. In doing so, he links the concept of the secular to this particular sphere – rather than e.g. the spheres of individual convictions or economic discourses. And finally, one has to note how Barrows conceptualizes the notions of 'the religious' and 'the secular' as two opposite social realms. In the above quotation, the distinction between 'the religious' and 'the secular' is constructed along the lines of friendliness (and hostility) – rather than e.g. a matter of legal standards or structural differences.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the explicit references to the secular are embedded into a 'soft' confrontation between 'the religious' and 'the secular'. And this really seems to be a common feature throughout the

26 Barrows, *Address of Chairman John Henry Barrows of the General Committee*, p. 76.

'Popular and illustrated History of the World's first Parliament of Religions'. The letter-sequence 'secular' appears eight times on the 800 pages of Barrows' first volume on 'the Parliament'. And in all these text-sequences, the concept of the secular is used with direct juxtaposition to a notion such as 'religious', 'sacred', 'spiritual' etc.:

- secular and spiritual matters (p. 379),
- secular and religious basis (p. 380),
- secular and sacred history (p. 502),
- secular and religious life (p. 708),
- secular and spiritual life (p. 711),
- secular and true educator (p. 760), and
- secular and Hindu principles (p. 778).

This is exactly the point where the implicit references to 'the secular' come in. If Barrows opposes 'the religious' and 'the secular' in this way, one has to ask the question: How does he construct the social sphere opposing 'the religious'? – Interestingly enough, this is primarily done in an implicit way.

3.4 *Implicit References to 'the Secular' in the Initial Address*

Two quotations help to grasp this implicit dimension of Barrows' concepts of 'the secular'. They both come from the center of his Initial Address. In the first quotation, Barrows makes the point that:

We are met as religious men, believing even here in this capital of material wonders, in the presence of an Exhibition which displays unparalleled marvels of steam and electricity, that there is a spiritual root of all human progress. (p. 75)

And in the same context, Barrows adds:

There is a true and noble sense in which America is a Christian nation, since Christianity is recognized by the supreme court, by the courts of several states, by executive officers, by general national acceptance and observance as the prevailing religion of our people. This does not mean, of course, that church and state are united. In America they are separated, and in this land the widest spiritual and intellectual freedom is realized. (p. 74)

Taken together, these two quotations clearly document the implicit dimension of Barrows' treatment of 'the secular': In the first quote, he positions the 'Parliament' within a society he constructs as clearly distinct from religion.

Barrows stresses the Chicago World Fair as a point of reference for the activities at the 'Parliament', and opposes the world 'of steam and electricity' to the meeting of 'religious men'. In the second quote Barrows highlights not only the role of America as an emerging global economic power, but also the significance of legal secularism in the United States by presenting the separation of church and state as the *conditio sine qua non* of America as a 'Christian nation'.

In other words, Barrows' construction of the secular does not document an explicit competition or confrontation between different sets of ideas. The 'Parliament' seems not to have been the place of an open dispute between 'the religious' and 'the secular'. The references to 'the secular' rather document an implicit confrontation of two social spheres. In this sense, Barrows constructs the 'Parliament' as a stronghold of religion in a secular context. The 'Parliament' is presented as a coalition of multiple religious actors vis-à-vis a socio-cultural context perceived as secular. And this coalition is constructed in a way that consists of representatives of multiple religious traditions from all over the world as well as the multifold peoples interested in the presentations of these representatives in the United States of America.

In sum, these considerations point towards two directions: On the one hand, Barrows' Initial Address constructs the 'Parliament' as being immersed into – yet distinct from – 'the secular' and it documents how this particular situation is framed in terms of an opposition. On the other hand, the Initial Address illustrates that religion (in juxtaposition with 'the secular') is no longer defined by the reference to one singular religious tradition but rather a multitude of religious traditions that unite vis-à-vis the 'secular' and are shaped by secular discourses, organizations and movements.

In this respect, the Initial Address documents a post-Herbergian settlement of the religious situation in the USA – virtually enacted half a century before Herberg's formulation of the famous triad of Protestants, Catholics and Jews (1955).²⁷ It stands for an attempt of a particular milieu within the US – society around 1900 that is globally interconnected and tries to implicitly unite 'the religious' vis-à-vis the secular. And this interpretation strongly proposes to understand IRD activities within a wider theoretical context that moves beyond theories of pluralization and stresses the impact of secularization on IRD-activities.

So, let us see to what extent such a theoretical perspective helps to shed light on at least some of the national case studies brought together in the present volume.

²⁷ Herberg, *Protestant – Catholic – Jew*.

4 Final Remarks: Secularization and Interreligious Dialogue in Europe

The following considerations are – of course – only of heuristic character. The most recent debates on the concept of the secular (including e.g. authors such as Grace Davie, Peter L. Berger and José Casanova) have repeatedly been underlining the differences of secularization processes in Europe and the United States of America – *inter alia* arguing that the process of declining social impact has been stronger in Europe while the process of privatization has been particularly significant in the United States of America.²⁸ In the second edition of her 'Sociology of Religion', Grace Davie summarizes the distinct dynamics of European religions in a way that underlines the historic contingency of the processes in question:

Europeans, as a consequence of the state church system (an historical fact whether you like it or not) regard their churches as public utilities rather than competing firms. [...] It is not that the market isn't there (it quite obviously is in most parts of Europe, if not quite in all); it is simply that the market doesn't work given the prevailing attitudes of large numbers in the population.²⁹

And of course, the socio-cultural situation of present-day Europe is fundamentally different from the situation of the USA around 1900. Nevertheless, it is even more interesting to see that the analytic perspective developed by the case study of the 1893-'Parliament' helps to further inscribe a secularization perspective into the discussions of the present volume. In this respect, the Scandinavian papers probably provide the two national case studies that are most supportive for a reading of IRD-activities along the lines of secularization theory.

4.1 *Cases Supporting a Secularization-Approach: Scandinavia*

Without any doubt, the authors of the Scandinavian papers are very clear that Sweden and Denmark have become religiously diverse societies that are characterized by religious pluralization – due to processes of migration, transnational networks, the influence of modern media etc. In addition to this, Lise Paulsen Galal underlines in her contribution that the Danish 'Folkekirke' is in

²⁸ Berger/Davie/Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?*; Casanova, *Westliche christliche Säkularisierung und Globalisierung*.

²⁹ Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 87.

itself highly pluralized and should be understood as an umbrella organization of local churches rather than a single organizational entity.³⁰ And the article of Magdalena Nordin underlines to what extent IRD-activities take multiple forms and are thus in themselves plural.³¹

At the same time, however, the Scandinavian cases clearly present the developments of IRD in Sweden and Denmark within the context of an increasing process of secularization – first in terms of a divergent degree of religious de-establishment and second in terms of a decline in the social and individual significance of religion. The Swedish case study by Magdalena Nordin stresses the differences between local and national modes of IRD. On both levels, Nordin underlines how the secular state frames IRD-activities and how the diverse religious actors try to position themselves as a joint partner for and/or vis-à-vis the state. Along similar lines, Lise Paulsen Galal refers to the role of IRD in political debates and controversies as well as the ways in which IRD-actors have been positioning religion within these controversies.

In other words, the two articles on Scandinavia strongly support the idea that the specific construction of IRD as a coalition of religious actors vis-à-vis 'the secular' might be useful to assess the present-day IRD-landscape. They propose that it is not sufficient to analyze IRD-activities as a response to immigration processes (and respective processes of religious pluralization). They rather suggest to understand IRD within the context of historically contingent processes of secularization and differentiation – focusing in particular on the juxtaposition of the church and the state.

But not all the national case analyses are so much in line with this particular analysis of IRD-activities. There are other cases in the present volume that are more resistant towards an interpretation of IRD within the context of secularization theory, and point into different directions.

4.2 *Need for further Differentiation: Turkey and Germany*

The first of these more 'resistant' cases in the present issue of JRAT³² is Turkey: Throughout their paper, the authors of the Turkish case analysis³³ stress the relatively high percentage of Muslims in Turkey. Against this backdrop, a pluralization approach would suggest that there should be no significant IRD-activities within this country: If there is no religious plurality, there should

30 Galal, *Between Representation and Subjectivity*.

31 Nordin, *How to Understand Interreligious Dialogue in Sweden*.

32 Throughout this text, references are made to other articles from this issue of JRAT: Lehmann, *Interreligious Dialogue in Context*.

33 Furat/Er, *From Dialogue to Living Together*.

be no IRD. The paper of Hamit Er and Zişan Furat has, however, presented very distinct developments of IRD-concepts within Turkey – focusing in particular on the various official proclamations dealing with the topic.

In this respect, the Turkish case asks to further differentiate the relationship between theories of pluralization and secularization to understand IRD-activities. The empirical analyses of the Turkish paper suggest that EU-membership-negotiations (and to a lesser degree: the discussions following the 9/11-attacks) have exerted a decisive influence on the establishment of IRD-activities within this country. In the light of the initial discussions of the present paper, it can thus be argued that specific secular discourses have shaped Turkish IRD-activities during the early 2000s. At least, these discourses seem to have initiated official references to IRD in Turkey.

The analysis of IRD-activities in the eastern parts of Germany provides a second ‘resistant’ case: In terms of formal church membership, the region of the former GDR certainly is among the most secular parts of Europe. The ‘SMRE – the Swiss Meta-Database of religious Affiliation in Europe’ identifies Germany as the only European country that is religiously ‘fragmented’ – due to the high percentage of what the SMRE labels as ‘religiously non-affiliated’ within the eastern parts of Germany. So, from the point of view of secularization theory, IRD-activities should be very strong in the region of the former GDR. Anna Körs and Karsten Lehmann,³⁴ however, identify in their case analysis a rather low density of IRD-activities.

Once again, this asks for further differentiation of the present argument. In the final section of their article, Körs/Lehmann interpret the particular situation in the eastern parts of Germany at first with regards to the profound absence of religious actors in the regions of the former GDR. At the same time, the paper shows that wider IRD-networks seem to have substituted the absence of local or regional IRD-actors in those parts of Germany – at least with regards to individualized commitment. If there are IRD-activities in the eastern parts of Germany, they are forged by individual actors that relate to a more general IRD-discourse. These actors want to be a religious voice – exactly within a secular context and IRD-activities help to forge the respective coalitions.

So, taken together, the two ‘resistant’ cases actually further underline two dimensions of the present argument that have already been mentioned earlier: On the one hand, they illustrate that the concept of ‘the secular’ forms an indispensable backdrop to understand IRD-activities. On the other hand, they further highlight that the influence of ‘the secular’ is a highly complex one and that simple notions of religious decrease are not sufficient. Actually, the cases

34 Körs/Lehmann, *Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) Activities in East Germany*.

rather propose that – in line with the more recent debates around the notion of the secular – it seems to be particularly helpful to combine theories of secularization and pluralization to better understand the processes in question.

This brings us to the two research-questions that served as the starting-point for the present article.

4.3 *Questions for further Research*

The present article started from two very broad questions. The first of these questions asked for empirical evidence. The preceding analyses and considerations should have made it clear that ‘the secular’ is an important dimension of the construction of IRD-activities – even though references to ‘the secular’ were primarily implicit rather than explicit. They also underline a need to have a closer look at the significance of a general IRD-discourse and its influence on national as well as local and regional IRD-activities. So, in short: Yes, there are references to ‘the secular’ but they are less obvious than one might expect and it will be interesting to learn why this is the case.

The second question asked for the usefulness of secularization theory with regards to the analysis of IRD-activities. The preceding analyses have provided interesting clues as to how present-day secularization theories might help to advance the understanding of IRD-activities. At the same time, they put IRD-activities within a wider context of socio-cultural change. Between these two poles, a complex model of secularization that tries to understand the dynamic relationship between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ – rather than the general demise of religion – seems to be helpful to analyze IRD-activities.

Before these final considerations, it might be interesting to come back to Peter L. Berger and to refer to one of his lesser-known early texts. In an article published in the 1963 edition of ‘Social Research’, Berger described ecumenicity as an attempt by Christian denominations to monopolize the religious market in the US:

We are thus faced here with the classic picture of competition between a large number of units in a free market. [... Under these conditions,] cartelization rationalizes competition by reducing the number of competing units by amalgamation and also by dividing up the market between the larger units to remain. [... In such a setting,] typically brand A of a consumer product is set off against brand B by what economists know as marginal differentiation.³⁵

35 Berger, *A Market Model for the Analysis of Ecumenicity*, p. 86, p. 89.

Such a version of a market-theory might also be helpful to further expand upon the implicit significance of ‘the secular’ in IRD-activities. At least on the meso-level of religious organizations, the processes of cartelization and amalgamation highlighted in the quotation from Peter L. Berger’s 1963-article seem to be part and parcel of IRD-activities – at any rate vis-à-vis what the respective actors perceive as ‘the secular’. And the national case analyses brought together in the present issue of JRAT³⁶ suggest that similar processes are at work with regards to the embeddedness of IRD-activities within more general discourse on ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’.

Biography

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