PART FOUR

RELIGION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION
SHRINKING WORLD, EXPANDING RELIGION?
THE DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS INTERACTION IN THE
TIMES OF COLONIALISM AND GLOBALIZATION

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1. Collecting the Silent Undercurrents of Interreligious Dynamics

In Heinrich Böll’s well-known satirical story “Dr. Murkes gesammeltes Schweigen” (Dr. Murke’s Collected Silence, 1958), set in Germany in the 1950’s, an influential cultural figure called Bur-Malottke, whose talks are regularly broadcast on the radio, is suddenly beset by qualms about the frequent use he had made of the word “god” in his speeches since his conversion during the period of “religious enthusiasm (religiöse Begeisterung)” in 1945.¹ Now feeling “personally responsible” for the “preeminence of religion in public broadcast”, he demands that the word “god” be replaced, in every instance of his recorded speech, with the phrase “that higher being which we revere”. The young radio journalist Dr. Murke who is entrusted with the task of making the replacements in Bur-Malottke’s most recent talk and who is deeply antagonized by the vanities of broadcast culture in general and of Bur-Malottke in particular, is allowed by the storyteller to vent his frustrations in two ways: by attaching a small devotional picture his pious mother had sent him to a wall in the broadcast company’s building, a piece of “kitsch” in a self-consciously “cultured” environment, and by collecting (and eventually listening to) the brief phases of silence that he has to cut out of broadcast materials. In the story’s final scene, another broadcast

¹ Immediately after the end of World War II, Germans turned in large numbers to the churches, which not only offered orientation but also assumed administrative and political functions in an otherwise chaotic society, as the allied forces accepted church representatives as negotiation partners. This short post-war period therefore gained the epithet “the hour of the church”. See e.g. Kurt Jürgensen, Die Stunde der Kirche. Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Schleswig-Holsteins in den ersten Jahren nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, Neumünster: Wachholtz 1976. A similar, also short-term growth of the influence of the churches could be witnessed in Eastern Europe after the break-down of Socialism, see Detlef Pollack, Rückkehr des Religiösen? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland und Europa 2, Tübingen: Mohr, 2009, 105–108.