Europe: Arena of Pluralization and Diversification of Religions

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Abstract

If participation in church activities is critical for the strength or weakness of religion, there is no denying that Europe comes off poorly. According to American sociologists of religion the rise of religious pluralism in the USA was due to the strict separation between state and church; it compelled congregations and denominations to compete for believers. The European case is different. Here the diversity of religions existed long before the modern period. Since its ancient beginning European culture sought its authorities outside its geographical confines. Greeks and Jews, Hellenism and Hebraism, Athens and Jerusalem, later Mecca and Islam became cultural points of orientation for people living in Europe. The article addresses the cultural and social processes that transformed these and other foreign religious traditions into typical European manifestations: the *Roman legal system* turned foreign religions into legal categories; it was *modernization* that led to the articulation of distinctly religious meanings of history and of nature; and it was the *detachment from the church* that provided the impetus for new societal forms of religion. Those processes are at the center of the European plurality and diversity of religions.

One who tackles the subject of religious pluralism enters a field dominated by strong hypotheses. According to the American sociologist of religion Peter L. Berger,[1] it was secularization that led to a religious pluralism. Through the separation between church and state, religions lose their monopolist position

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[1] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1967).

and need to be marketed; one is no longer born into a religious truth, but must choose this truth personally; the choices on offer are differentiated in keeping with the wishes and expectations of the customers, and are correspondingly pluralistic. The triumphal march of the religious communities in the USA, where there is a consistent separation between state and church, and the vibrant religious life in these communities are the best proof of this connection.

If all this is correct, and participation in church activities is the standard measure of the strength or weakness of religion, there is no denying that Europe comes off poorly. The religions of the United States display an enormous vitality and variety, which even increases the closer one comes to present times. American religion has become one of the most important chapters in recent religious history.[2] This dynamic completely contradicts the long-held expectation that religion in modern cultures would be marginalized, and it has given sociologists of religion much food for thought. Many of them seek to explain it with the help of an economic hypothesis: whereas large hierarchical organizations tend towards complacency, the situation of competition continuously compels small religious groups to try to win new members. This results in an optimal exploitation of the religious market, favoring a diversification of religion. On this view, the marginalization of religion is the result, not of a decline in religious needs, but of an unattractive offer on the part of the large churches.[3]

1. Europe as an Historical and Cultural Notion

No one who looks at the religious history of Europe would conclude that the pluralism of religions came into being only in the modern period; but

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[2] Michael Hochgeschwender, *Amerikanische Religion: Evangelikalismus, Pfingstlertum und Fundamentalismus* (Frankfurt/M.: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2007); idem, "Religion, Nationale Mythologie und Nationale Identität: Zu den methodischen und inhaltlichen Debatten in der amerikanischen 'New Religious History,'" *Historisches Jahrbuch* 124 (2004), 435–520.

[3] This theoretical approach is known in the USA as the "rational choice theory of religion." For an overview of the proponents of this approach, see Lawrence A. Young (ed.) *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997). Steve Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) offers a critique of this explanatory model. He argues that no general hypothesis is applicable to all the cases of religious vitality in the modern period.

before I discuss this in detail, I should like to say something about the term *Europe.* In Greek—the first language in which this word is found— "Europe" is the region to the west, in the direction of the sinking sun, a region with which one was linked by maritime routes. Etymologically, the Greek term seems to go back to a Semitic root *ereb*, meaning "dark," "evening." An analogous creation of a word, perhaps constructed from the same root, is the Arabic term *maghreb* for the regions of North Africa, which lay to the west.[4]

A geographical designation is not the same thing as an historical and cultural concept. It becomes this kind of concept only when the inhabitants of the regions to which this name is given understand themselves as part of a larger unity, no matter how rudimentary such a consciousness may be. One factor in the formation of such a consciousness in these regions was the fact that both Greek culture and the Jewish and Christian religions (as well as Islam at a later date) came to the West from the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean area. They remained an abiding point of orientation for western culture, even when the center of gravity in this culture moved from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. This led to the formation of special concepts. George Steiner speaks of biculturalism as a specific characteristic of Europe; Rémi Brague regards Europe's identity as "eccentric," since it lies, not in Europe itself, but outside the continent; Edgar Morin locates the unity of Europe in a complexity which embraces the greatest differences without merging them into one another.[5] All three authors refer to the same point, viz. that Greeks and Jews, Hellenism and Hebraism, Athens and Jerusalem became cultural points of orientation for people in the West. Europeans chose their authorities from a past and from a region that were not their own, and they kept at a respectful distance from them. We see the same strategy vis-à-vis the Greek philosophers and the Hebrew Bible: the texts were translated, but the translation never supplanted the original. The typically European strategy was not the accommodation of the foreign element to the local culture, but the preservation of the distance.

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[4] Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, 4th edition, 9 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007), vol. 4 (1999), 1662; Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2002 [French original 1992]), 2–4; Edgar Morin, *Europa denken* (Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 1991 [French original 1987]), 33–35.

[5] George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Brague, *Eccentric Culture*; Morin, *Europa denken,* 19.

This perspective confronts us directly with the problems associated with European religious pluralism. How did the inhabitants of the West accept the foreign religions from far-off regions, and what kind of cultural form, what kind of societal stamp did they imprint upon these religions? If we are to grasp how these religions were appropriated we must look at three cultural and social processes: It was the *legal system* that turned religious groups and their worship into legal categories; it was *modernization* that led to the articulation of distinctly religious meanings of history and of nature; and it was the *detachment from the church* that provided the impetus for new societal forms of religion. Those processes are at the center of the European diversification of religions.

2. The Western Legal Tradition and the Structuring of Religious Variety

A legal tradition which exists down to the present day began with the Roman Law of Twelve Tables.[6] This did not have a sacred origin. It emerged in the mid-fifth century BCE from political debates between plebeians and patricians, and regulated questions of private law; it did not include public law. Nevertheless, the regulations of this Law dealing with private assemblies and associations, as well as the private performance of rituals, show that the private law, too, was based on the maxim of the common good.

This law gave citizens the right to found an association modeled on the *res publica*, the body of the state, provided that this was done publicly. An association of this kind possessed an obligatory internal ordering with its own laws, and had common property and a common treasure-chest. The association could act through a representative (*Dig.* 3.4.1,1). Throughout classical antiquity, private persons were the driving force in the foundation of associations. In the Roman Empire, the authorization of new associations was linked to conditions, and was frequently refused. Tens of thousands of inscriptions give us an idea of how widespread these associations were in the Roman Empire.

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[6] The fundamental study of the history of the legal tradition is: Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). On the codification of religion in law, cf. Hans G. Kippenberg & Gunnar Folke Schuppert (eds.), *Die verrechtlichte Religion: Der Öffentlichkeitsstatus von Religionsgemeinschaften* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

The associations operated in the societal sphere between the houses on the one hand and the state rulers and institutions on the other. Through this legal form, religions entered the public sphere without thereby becoming state cults. The early Christian communities and their legal status offer a good illustration of what this meant. Tertullian, a respected Roman citizen of Carthage who may himself have been a lawyer, converted to Christianity in the 190's. He was familiar with the accusations that the Christians constituted an illegal organization or a forbidden association, and rejected these charges in his *Apologeticum* (38.1; 39.20). Christians were not obsessed by the search for fame and dignity, and nothing was more foreign to them than political activity (*res publica*) (38.3). They met for prayers (which included intercessions for the emperor) and to read the scriptures in common. Their assemblies were led by the one who was oldest in the community; there was a common chest to which each made a monthly contribution. This money was not spent upon banquets or drinking parties or thankless eating-houses,

> but to feed the poor and to bury them, for boys and girls who lack property and parents, and then for slaves grown old and shipwrecked mariners; and any who may be in mines, islands or prisons, provided it is for the sake of God's school (*secta dei*), become the pensioners of their confession. (*Apologeticum* 39.5–6)

Tertullian conceived of the Christians here as a community which took care of those who needed protection (widows, orphans, the poor, travelers, prisoners, those sold into slavery) in a manner that was without equal in pagan antiquity. This was probably why the Christians were tolerated by the Imperial authorities, although they were not officially authorized. More than a century was to pass before Tertullian's demand for official recognition was granted and the Christian church was officially admitted as an association in accordance with the conditions of Roman law. Thereafter, the church adopted the regulations of this law as the legitimate basis of its official existence.

When Christianity began to spread in the Roman empire, two centuries earlier, the pagan authors Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 10.96–97), Tacitus (*Ann.* 44.2–5), and Suetonius (*Nero* 16.2), who all wrote in the brief period between 110 and 122, CE agreed that the new religion was not a *religio*, but a *superstitio* which offended the gods. According to Seneca, *religio deos colit, superstitio violat*, "Religion honors the gods, superstition offends them" (*De clementia* 2.5,1). The decisive criterion here might be soothsaying, a foreign provenance, or harmful rituals. Before long, Christians were

claiming to be the true *religio.* Tertullian laid claim to the term *religio* for Christianity, and reversed the categories, saying that Roman cults were *superstitio* (*Adv. Marcionem* 1.9,2; *Scorpiace* 10.6). The Christians went so far as to reinterpret the etymology, falsely deriving *religio* from *religare* ("to bind [to God]"), rather from *relegere* ("conscientious ritual behavior"), as would have been correct.

Less than fifty years after Emperor Theodosius licensed the Roman Catholic church as the sole true *religio* of the Roman Empire in 380, his successors Theodosius II and Valentinian III initiated the project of a collection of all the constitutions (i.e., binding decrees) of the Christian emperors, thereby continuing the reversal of categories by means of laws.[7] When this legal material was edited, classes ("titles") of decrees were formed, in which we can still discern the distant starting point in Table 8 of the Law of Twelve Tables: viz., the punishment of magic and soothsaying, and of illicit assemblies or associations. The decrees concerning magic and astrology were collected under the title "On magicians, astrologers, and other criminals" in Book 9 of the Theodosian Code, which deals with criminal offenses. A century later, the Code of Justinian includes these regulations under the same title, "On magic, the astrologers, and other criminals" in Book 9, which likewise deals with criminal offenses, expanding the section at the beginning (9.18,1–2) by means of two pre-Christian imperial constitutions, those of Antoninus Pius and Diocletian. The editors thus make a deliberate link to the earlier pagan criminalization of specific kinds of magic and astrology, in accordance with Emperor Justinian's will to restore the ancient Rome.[8] After the reception of Justinian's legislative work from the eleventh century on, this law became the basis for the persecution of witches.

The laws governing associations were collected in Book 16 of the Theodosian Code from a perspective which finds a pregnant formulation in one of the edicts: "We know that our society (*res publica*) is sustained more by *religiones* than by official duties (*officia*) and physical toil and sweat" (16.2,16, promulgated by Constantius and Justin in 361). The common good demands more than a good administration and economy: it is entirely

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[7] For the following account, I draw on John Matthews, "The Making of the Text," in: Jill Harries & Ian Wood (eds.), *The Theodosian Code* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 19–44.

[8] Mischa Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians: Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 165–182 and 198–209.

dependent on religion. This view is attested in the history of Roman religion even before Christianity; in the earlier context, it had justified the adoption of foreign cults in the pagan pantheon,[9] but now it justified their exclusion, since the religion which this society had to practice was defined in title 1 exclusively as the Roman Catholic faith which the apostle Peter had handed over to the Romans, and which had been formulated at the council of Nicaea (16.1,2). Only *this* association is the corporation recognized by the emperors, and legitimately possesses a chest and property. Its clergy are exempt from the services which other citizens and decurions are obliged to perform for the state, and they enjoy legal immunity.

The Roman legal principles generated classifications which mapped out the religious varieties of antiquity in an orderly fashion.[10] *Apostates* lose the right to receive an inheritance or to draw up a valid will. One who demonstratively rejects the Christian faith loses all claims in the spheres of matrimonial, inheritance, or contract law, and is cast off from the legal order. The *Jews* retain their ancient privileges of exemption from specific services to be rendered to the city and the state, and no one is permitted to take their synagogues from them; but they are no longer permitted to build new synagogues. *Pagans* are forbidden to offer sacrifice, not only in the temples, but also in their homes. The priests of pagan cults lose their privileges, but it is forbidden to destroy their temples. The primary focus, however, is on the *heretics.* In the aftermath of the narrow definition of the Catholic church as the sole legitimate religion, the heretics grow into an enormous, amorphous category, and differentiations become necessary, as we see from an edict promulgated by Emperor Theodosius in 428: "The madness of the heretics must be suppressed (*haereticorum est reprimenda insania*). […] They are not all to be punished with the same severity" (Theodosian Code 16.5,65 prologue and 2). Title 5, *de haereticis,* contains sixty-six imperial constitutions and struggles to cope with the variety of Christian associations which existed alongside the Roman Catholic church, and with their rights. Some heretical groups are allowed to possess a building in which they assemble, others are

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[9] On this mechanism, see Richard Gordon, "Religion in the Roman Empire: the Civic Compromise and its Limits," in: Mary Beard & John North (eds.), *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 235–255.

[10] The section presents the following sequence: the Catholic faith (16.1) – bishops, churches, and clerics (16.2) – monks (16.3) – contenders of religion (16.4) – heretics (16.5) – rebaptism (16.6) – apostates (16.7) – Jews, Caelicolists, and Samaritans (16.8) – Christian slaves with Jewish masters (16.9) – pagans, sacrifices, and temples (16.10) – the *religio* (16.11).

not allowed to assemble publicly in the cities, while still others are forbidden even to hold private gatherings. Most reprehensible of all are the *Manichaeans*, who are guilty of witchcraft (*maleficia*). They are outside the legal ordering, and are not permitted to assemble anywhere. They do not have the right to make a will or to inherit (16.5,7 and 7,3). Their heresy is a crime (*publicum crimen*). Landowners who offer them the use of a *villa* for their assemblies are threatened with expropriation. The procedure for bringing accusations against heretics is made easier: anonymous denunciations are admitted, without the usual risk incurred by the one who brought them. If a heretic returns to the church, no penalty will be inflicted on him. Throughout this section, we find the recurrent leitmotiv of the prohibition of assemblies and the punishment of those who take part in illicit gatherings (*illicitae congregationes*).[11] The Roman law became an instrument for a differentiated assessment of the contribution of religions to the common good.[12]

The laws governing religious associations, which came at the end of the Theodosian Code, were placed at the beginning of the Code of Justinian.[13] Under the title "On the heretics" (1.5), this Code revises section 16.9 of the Theodosian Code. Most of the legal differentiations contained in the earlier Code are eliminated; with few exceptions, membership in all non-Catholic Christian associations becomes a *publicum crimen* (*Code of Justinian* 1.5,4). All heretics now receive the same legal status as the Manichaeans. Harsher penalties are envisaged for those who disobey the prohibition on assemblies, including the confiscation of houses belonging to the associations. One who belongs to these associations loses a great deal, viz. the exemption from specific services to be rendered to the state, the right to inherit and to bequeath, and the right to make contracts. This person loses the rights of citizenship.

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[11] Further laws prohibiting assemblies: ibid. 16.5,5; 16.5,9; 16.5,12; 16.5,14; 16.5,15; 16.5,20; 16.5,24; 16.5,56.

[12] The Theodosian Code allowed non-Christian soothsaying under the condition that it was practiced in public, but the Code of Justinian absolutely forbade public soothsaying. On this, see Marie Theres Fögen, *Die Enteignung der Wahrsager: Studien zum Wissensmonopol in der Spätantike* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1993).

[13] The first Book presents the following sequence: the Trinity, the Catholic faith, which no one is permitted to call into question (1.1) – the property and the privileges of the churches (1.2) – the clergy (1.3) – the episcopal tribunal (1.4) – the heretics, Manicheans, and Samaritans (1.5) – the prohibition of rebaptism (1.6) – the apostates (1.7) – the rejection of the veneration of images (1.8) – the Jews and the worshipers of heaven (1.9) – pagans, sacrifices, and temples (1.10) – church asylum (1.11) – manumissions in churches (1.12). This is followed by remarks about the various forms of the laws of the rulers and of the senate.

When we study the mutual relationships between law and religious associations and practices of laypersons in the legal texts of late classical antiquity, we find a wealth of concepts, some of which still influence our modern vocabulary and its semantics: this is the source of categories such as *religio*, *superstitio*, *magia*, *maleficium*, church, heretics, pagans, Jews, astrologers, etc. All these terms are impregnated by the debates of legal scholars about the contribution of rituals and religious associations to the common good.

It is somewhat paradoxical that these categories, which were in fact meant to help exclude false religion, in reality helped keep it alive. Various factors were involved, beginning with the legal system itself. As Jill Harries has demonstrated, the citizens of classical antiquity did not believe that the laws possessed validity *per se*: the citizens promoted the observance of the laws only to the extent that these were in agreement with their own interests. The local people themselves had to want the heretics to be persecuted, and they had to get the local authorities to take action. The rulers' complaints show that this was often not the case.[14] Secondly, the ancient tradition of citizens' associations never died out in the western region of the empire. The researches of Otto Gerhard Oexle show that there is a continuity between the ancient associations and guilds and mediaeval fraternities bound by an oath.[15] A third factor was Catholic theology itself. The early Christians believed that Jesus Christ had vanquished the pagan gods and these had thereby become demons subject to him. When the church demonstrated in praxis the superiority of the cross to the demons by means of exorcisms, it presupposed the continuing existence of the ancient menacing powers—and this demonization made it possible for pagan magic to survive.[16] Thanks to all these factors, something of the religious diversity which was constituted by law also survived in practice in the culture of the Middle Ages.

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[14] Jill Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 77–98 ("The Efficacy of Law").

[15] Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Conjuratio und Gilde im frühen Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zum Problem der sozialgeschichtlichen Kontinuität zwischen Antike und Mittelalter," in: Berent Schwineköper (ed.) *Gilden und Zünfte: Kaufmännische und gewerbliche Genossenschaften im frühen und hohen Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1985), 151–213.

[16] Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," in: Valerie Flint, Richard Gordon, Georg Luck & Daniel Ogden (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, vol. 2, (London: Athlone, 1999), 277–348, at 280–281.

The debates of the legal scholars ensured that religious plurality became a fundamental datum of European history of religion. It remained the point of reference even for the gradual loosening of the ties between law and religion, and between the civil law and faith, after the Reformation. When the Peace of Westphalia (1648) made it possible for the three rival confessions of Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists to live together in the public sphere of one and the same state, the basis for the persecution of heretics was removed;[17] the same soon happened to the crime of witchcraft (*maleficium*). Around 1700, the idea that human beings could make a pact with the devil, and that they must be punished for this, was declared an irrational superstition (*superstitio*) and was banished from the courtrooms. Legal scholars such as Thomasius were the driving force behind this change.[18] The General Law of Prussia and the Bavarian Criminal Code no longer included the relevant regulations of the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* and the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*. The decriminalization of witchcraft/magic and of heresy opened the door to an historical study of these phenomena. They lost their malicious meaning and were perceived as autonomous worldviews in European religious history. But although these categories no longer incurred punishment, this did not change the evaluation of them as inappropriate and deviant forms of religion.

What remained was the legal protection of religious institutions from offensive attacks. In the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*, which was promulgated by the Diet in Regensburg in 1532 and remained "a kind of framework law of the empire"[19] until the end of the eighteenth century, blasphemy (§ 106) was a punishable offense. It remained so in most of the new national legal systems, but with one important change. In late antiquity, Justinian's Novel 77 had prescribed a penalty on the grounds that the blasphemer must be punished in order to divert the divine wrath from society. This argument was still presupposed by the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*, but it became untenable in the Enlightenment period. Even at that time, however, there was a widespread conviction that only the Christian churches could ensure the moral foundations of society, and that

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[17] Eduard Kohlrausch, *Die Beschimpfung von Religionsgemeinschaften: Ein Beitrag zur Strafrechtsform* (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1908), 9–12.

[18] Wolfgang Behringer (ed.), *Hexen und Hexenprozesse in Deutschland* (Munich: dtv, 2000), 400–458.

[19] Uwe Wesel, *Geschichte des Rechts: Von den Frühformen bis zum Vertrag von Maastricht* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997), 384.

atheism would undermine these. The General Prussian Law of 1794 envis-
aged penalties for those who insulted a Christian church, disturbed its
worship, sowed hatred among the religious parties, or founded sects. The
French penal code of 1810 and the Bavarian Criminal Code of 1813 like-
wise envisaged penalties for those who disturbed the public order by offend-
ing a Christian religious society.[20] Those who insulted religious communities
put at risk the peace and cohesion of a society, and the police could be used
to prevent them from doing so. In the contemporary criminal code of the
Federal Republic of Germany, penalties are incurred for insulting religious
confessions or groups with a particular worldview or religious communi-
ties, when such an insult disturbs public peace (§ 166). This paragraph
protects Christian teachings and churches. The protection of minorities
(including religious minorities) from propaganda attacks is regulated by
§ 130 (on incitement of the people).[21] This certainly untied the ancient
parcel of prohibitions of those religions which were not in the public
interest; at the same time, however, it created a model of religious plurality in
which the idea of the right religion, as a shared societal property, lived on.

3. Articulating Distinct Religious Meanings of Nature and History in Modern Culture

Another process which left its mark on the religions of Europe was moderni-
zation. But what does it mean to speak of the 'modern period' with regard to
the 'religions'? Before we look at European religious history, let us first look at
the history of the concept of 'modernity.' It acquired its specific character
at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth,
in the famous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, the debate among French
intellectuals about whether the present epoch was superior in every respect
to the past, and especially to classical antiquity. One objection to the thesis
of superiority was that the arts of antiquity offered a model unsurpassed by
the present day, and were in this sense unaffected by scientific and technical
progress. In the course of the debate, a consensus emerged that there is no
measurable progress in art such as is possible in technology and science;
even in a technologically and scientifically advanced age, classical art retains

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[20] Kohlrausch, *Beschimpfung,* 29–33.
[21] Tatjana Hörnle, *"Grob Anstößiges Verhalten." Strafrechtlicher Schutz von Moral, Gefühlen und Tabus* (Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 2005), 353.

a right of its own.[22] On this view, where a "discord with the present age"[23] is constitutive of a culture, this must count as a 'modern' culture.

This outcome generated further problems. It was indeed now possible to maintain that earlier or foreign cultures possessed a value of their own, independently of any progress in their history; but it was necessary to explain how both (progress and autonomous values) were related to each other. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) took up this question and formed concepts which mediated between that which was enduring and that which belonged to the present day. He thus took an anti-Enlightenment position.[24] Where Immanuel Kant and others demanded that one must free oneself from subjugation to the tradition and follow one's reason alone, Herder developed the thesis that "No individual among us has become a human being through his own self."[25] Where Enlightenment philosophers made emancipation from the 'tradition' the criterion of genuine education, Herder elaborated a completely different criterion, with its starting point in the linguistic dimension. Words are more than merely the designation of objects or circumstances which exist independently of language. They represent a power which is capable of establishing a non-instrumental relationship to the world. "The older and more original a language is, the greater is the interplay of the feelings too in the roots of the words."[26] This "spirit of metaphors" is found not only in Hebrew (the allegedly divine language), but in all languages. Words can indeed degenerate into a mere set of instruments for use in naming

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[22] Charles Perrault's book *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences* (1688; reprint Munich: Eidos, 1964) played a fundamental role in the genesis of this view. See the important introduction by Hans Robert Jauß (reprint, 8–64) with reference to the emergence of a new historical thinking (12). My remarks are based on Jauß and on Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Modern, Modernität, Moderne," in: Otto Brunner, Werner Conze & Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1978), vol. 4, 93–131.

[23] This is the brilliant formulation by the literary scholar Hans Robert Jauß, "Literarische Tradition und gegenwärtiges Bewußtsein der Modernität," in: idem, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 5th edition 1974), 11–66, p. 49.

[24] Here, I follow Karl Menges, "Herder und die 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes'. Eine wirkungsgeschichtliche Replik," in: Walter Haug & Wilfried Barner (eds.), *Ethische contra Ästhetische Legitimation von Literatur. Traditionalismus und Modernismus: Kontroversen um den Avantgardismus* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), 154–166.

[25] Johann Gottfried Herder, in Book 9 of *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784/1785), in: idem, *Werke* 6, ed. by Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt/M.: Klassiker Verlag, 1989), 338 (tr. H.G.K.).

[26] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), ed. by Hans Dietrich Imscher (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1989), 63 (tr. H.G.K.).

things, but their early history teaches us their true significance. It is only in a language which does not engage in abstractions that the reason can unfold its true, humane power. This path leads Herder to reflect on religion, which is in a very particular manner a gift of tradition:

> Whence then did religion come to these peoples? Did every wretch invent his own act of worship, as a kind of natural theology? These toilers do not invent anything; at every point, they follow the tradition of their ancestors. […] Here too, therefore, tradition is the mother that continues to give birth to their language and their scanty culture, as well as to their religion and their sacred customs.[27]

The study of the history of religion acquaints us with worldviews which do not believe in the calculability of nature and of history.[28] When however this traditional religion is brought into relationship with the experience of progress, it allows traditional religiosity to become reflexive. Two cases offer good illustrations of this reflexive religiosity.

3.1. *The Esoteric Pattern of the Interpretation of Nature*

Only a few years after Herder published his *Ideen*, Friedrich Schiller wrote his poem *Die Götter Griechenlands* (1788),[29] in which the Greek gods appear as beings from an epoch in which the cosmos had not yet lost its soul:

> Ye in the age gone by
> Who ruled the world—a world how lovely then!—
> And guided still the steps of happy men
>   In the light leading-strings of careless joy!
> Ah, flourish'd then your service of delight!

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[27] Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 372 (tr. H.G.K.).

[28] Marcia Bunge, "Herder's Historical View of Religion and the Study of Religion in the Nineteenth Century and Today," in: Wulf Köpke (ed.), *Johann Gottfried Herder: Academic Disciplines and the Pursuit of Knowledge* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1966), 232–244. On the history of linguistic theory in general, and of Herder's theory in particular, see Jürgen Trabant, *Europäisches Sprachdenken: Von Platon bis Wittgenstein* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2006), 217–229. On Herder's influence on one of the founders of the academic study of religion see Lourens van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller: A Life Devoted to the Humanities* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2002), 191 and frequently.

[29] Friedrich Schiller, *Werke und Briefe* 1: *Gedichte,* ed. by Georg Kurscheidt (Frankfurt/M.: Insel, 1992), 285–291.

> How different, oh, how different, in the day
> When thy sweet fanes with many a wreath were bright,
> O Venus Amathusia!

According to Schiller, it was Christianity and natural science that ended this harmony of the gods with nature.

> And to enrich the worship of the ONE,
> A universe of Gods must pass away![30]

Poetry still succeeds in lending the pagan Greek gods a voice against the mechanization of nature, and thus against the Jewish-Christian creator god.

Schiller's critical view of the Jewish-Christian creation myth became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century. In particular, the educated classes of the nineteenth century attached great importance to the idea that European culture has two roots. In addition to the Jewish-Christian root, there is the Greco-Roman root; alongside *Hebraism* there is also *Hellenism.* Many held that 'Hebraism' had deprived nature of its soul, and they saw in 'Hellenism' the advocate of a revelation of the divine in nature that deserved to be appreciated more highly in the age of rationalism. In England, Matthew Arnold, a sensitive and critical observer of the industrialization which was proceeding at high speed, complained that the only thing that interested the English middle class was gainful employment. He looked in the religious history of England for the causes of this one-sided preference of practical matters, and identified it as a late consequence of the Puritans' rejection of the Renaissance. In this context, he employed the conceptual pair *Hebraism and Hellenism*,[31] which stand for two distinct abilities of the human person, viz. to act conscientiously and to think objectively. One can speak of a functioning culture only when these are in equilibrium, and each acts as a check upon the other—but the culture of the English middle classes has lost its balance and has sacrificed 'Hellenism' on the altar of 'Hebraism.' Interests are more powerful than knowledge, and the consequence is anarchy. Through this liaison, labor has become an end in itself, and religion has degenerated into a soulless machine. Like Schiller, the

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[30] Translation by Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Poems and Ballads of Schiller* (London & New York: Frederick Warne and Co., 1887), 304.

[31] Matthew Arnold, "Hebraism and Hellenism," in: idem, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (1869) (London: Elder 1875), 128–149.

British social critic Matthew Arnold summoned 'Hellenism' as a witness against the 'Hebraism' which he regarded as the principal reason why nature has lost its soul in the modern age.

This critical view of Judaism and Christianity as responsible for the loss of the soul of nature took on a particular importance in Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A natural philosophy drawing on pagan antiquity, which posited the divine *in* (rather than beyond) the human person and nature, helped generate modern religious trends which were known first as *new mysticism*, then as *New Age*, and are now called *esotericism*.[32] Formulations by the French scholar Antoine Faivre played a crucial role in the elaboration of the present concept of esotericism. He distilled from the history of European views of nature a "form of thought" which establishes symbolic and real reciprocal relationships between the visible and the invisible parts of the universe. In a mysterious manner, the human person as microcosm and the universe as macrocosm are linked by networks of sympathy and antipathy. Images, rituals, and symbols allow the human person to perceive the invisible in the visible. When nature is perceived as a bearer of spirit, this can lead to a transformation of the human self. Faivre gave this specific form of thinking the name "esotericism."[33]

Max Weber pointed out the tension that exists between this form of thinking and scientific conceptions of nature. As is well known, Weber identified the religious history of Judaism and Christianity as the driving force in the disenchantment of the world; but he also recognized the abiding fascination of the hellenistic view of nature. His conclusion—"'Nature' becomes a process when we do not ask what 'meaning' it has"[34]—shows very clearly that the modern conception of nature has its origin in the expulsion of older natural-philosophical conceptions.

3.2. *Apocalyptic Patterns of the Interpretation of History*

The inner discord of the modern period ultimately led scholars to distance themselves from the idea of history as progress. And traditional apocalyptic

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[32] On this, see Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005).
[33] Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 1–19.
[34] Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 3rd edition 1968), 332.

did not die out with the Enlightenment;[35] the French Revolution and its cult of reason, which ended in terror, gave a new impetus to eschatological understanding of history. In accordance with the Book of Revelation, the replacement of Christianity by a pagan cult was interpreted as the beginning of the rule of Antichrist. Besides this, processes of societal transformation opened up new fields of operation for apocalyptic sects. In the age of industrialization (1790–1850), England experienced a veritable explosion of Protestant sects who expected the imminent end of the world.[36] Methodism successfully propagated a chiliasm of despair among the workers.[37] In Germany, too, religious expectations of the end of the world grew in number and importance in the nineteenth century, especially in the industrial regions.[38] All these apocalyptic sects shared the expectation that the Last Judgment would bring salvation to the righteous and damnation to the godless. In the twentieth century, Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic fundamentalism are all based on conceptions of salvation history.[39] In this context, Lucian Hölscher has appropriately written of a "doubling of the concept of future." After the emergence of science, which brought the ability to explain and control natural processes, the future moved from the eighteenth century onwards into the realm of the feasible:

> The coming time was less and less envisaged as the final age of humankind before the divine judgment of the world, and ever more strongly as an open age full of expectations, an age serving the full development of human needs and capabilities. Once the future had been 'discovered' as the still remaining part of history, it increasingly lost its numinous character.[40]

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[35] David S. Katz & Richard Popkin, *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988); Bernd U. Schipper & Georg Plasger (eds.), *Apokalyptik und kein Ende?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

[36] Eric J. Hobsbawn, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959) Chap. 7.

[37] Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963) Chap. 11, 2.

[38] Lucian Hölscher, *Weltgericht oder Revolution: Protestantische und sozialistische Zukunftsvorstellungen im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1989), 74–130.

[39] See the volume edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, one of the fruits of the Fundamentalism Project of the University of Chicago: *The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon, 1992). See also Hans G. Kippenberg, *Gewalt als Gottesdienst: Religionskriege im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2008).

[40] Lucian Hölscher, *Weltgericht oder Revolution*, 23, 32–34. Hölscher has set out his thesis in greater detail in idem, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1999) (tr. H.G.K.).

Nevertheless, the traditional concept of salvation history continued to exist. Alongside the future which was planned as progress from the stand-point of the present day, people continued to think of the future as Christian theology understood it, viz. from the standpoint of the end, of the Last Judgment. These two conceptions of the future became competitors in the modern period.

4. Detachment from the Church: The Driving Force of New Societal Forms of Religion

In the modern period in Europe, individual religiosity and ecclesiastical institutions have largely become detached from one another. This puts a question mark against those theses of secularization which make partici-pation in the religious life of local congregations the sole criterion of the strength or weakness of religion. One protagonist of such an interpreta-tion in Germany is Detlef Pollack, who diagnoses the decreasing partici-pation in church life as a decline in the significance of religion; a British protagonist is Steve Bruce, who sees an unbroken trend to detachment from the church going hand in hand with a fatal erosion of religion in all the western countries.[41]

'Secularization' is a theory with many strata, which can be applied to a great variety of processes: the legally organized transfer of ecclesiastical properties and institutions (e.g. in education and welfare) to the responsi-bility of the state; the decline of personal faith; the decrease in personal commitment to church institutions; the transformation of religious views and practices into cultural commonplaces. Of all these processes, the strongest indicator of the declining power of religion seems to be the alien-ation of the citizens from the churches. This thesis seems to be lent plausi-bility by the fact that as early as the end of the eighteenth century, priests and ministers were complaining about the decreasing participation of the believers in church life. However, historians of the modern period cannot confirm it in this form. The popular assumption in France that the detach-ment from the church was an inevitable consequence of the Enlightenment

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[41] Detlef Pollack, *Säkularisierung—ein moderner Mythos? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck , 2003); Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); cf. also idem, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is contradicted by the strengthening of French Catholicism in the first half of the nineteenth century.[42] A similar thesis has often been asserted in the case of Germany, viz. that detachment from the church is a consequence of industrialization, but this is equally questionable, since it does not concur with the evidence that the nineteenth century—the century of industrialization—was in fact a new, "second confessional age."[43]

In view of this evidence, we must ask how old is the thesis that religion is inexorably and as it were necessarily declining in Europe. Some years ago, Callum G. Brown offered an explanation of that expectation. He drew attention to the social composition of church communities. For a long time, Christian piety was spelled out as a masculine value, but this changed around the year 1800. It was not by chance that the angels, hitherto masculine beings, now became feminine: this indicated that with the emergence of the bourgeois family, women had become the basis of Christianity. The 'angel' at home had the task of giving the children a religious education and of reining in her husband so that he would not yield to the moral temptations that had their origin in industrialization and in the big city. From now on, a feminization of Christianity left its stamp on church life. When, however, women's emancipation began in the 1960's and a different morality governed the fields of family and sexuality, this basis collapsed.

This observation makes good sense of two discrepancies that can be observed in the religious statistics of almost every European country.[44] The first concerns the numerical relationship between individual religious convictions and the participation of these individuals in church activities. One example: in Sweden, only 6% of Christians go to church once a month; but personal religious views (e.g., faith in God, or belief in a life after death) are more widespread than this exiguous number of worshipers would suggest,

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[42] See Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789–1914* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[43] Olaf Blaschke, "Das 19. Jahrhundert: Ein Zweites Konfessionelles Zeitalter?," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000), 38–75; idem (ed.), *Konfessionen im Konflikt: Deutschland zwischen 1800 und 1970: ein zweites konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002). The controversies to which this concept gave rise are discussed by Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, "Euro-Gott im starken Plural? Einige Fragestellungen für eine europäische Religionsgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts," *Journal of Modern European History* 3 (2005), 231–256.

[44] On this, see grace Davie, Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World (London: Darton, Longman and Todd) 2002, 1–26. José Casanova, "Die religiöse Lage in Europa," in: Hans Joas & Klaus Wiegandt (eds.), *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 2007), 322–357.

since these views are found in more than half the population. At once, however, we see a second discrepancy. Although the statistics show that almost half the population tends towards atheism, 70% of the Swedes have remained members of their church. European sociologists of religion concentrate their attention today on discrepancies of this kind. As early as 1994, Grace Davie showed in a study of Great Britain that a low level of church commitment can coexist with a large diffusion of faith convictions; she called this "believing without belonging."[45] In the case of Sweden, we must also take into account the reverse: "belonging without believing." This can be observed especially in areas where religions become the driving force of social networks, as in Islamic mosque communities.

In another study, Grace Davie asked how it is possible for faith convictions to be handed on under the conditions of detachment from the churches. She found the explanation in the religious memory of a nation[46]—an explanation already envisaged by Danièle Hervieu-Léger in 1993.[47] Since religion is a part of the cultural memory of a nation, Grace Davie studied systems of education, the media, laws, and culture, including syntheses of pilgrimages and tourism, in order to show how secular institutions of this kind contribute to the maintenance of faith convictions and religious practices. Her conclusion is that the cultural memory can compensate in part for detachment from the church.

This does not, however, provide a sufficient explanation for the mobilization of religion that we experience in Europe today. Grace Davie brings another significant perspective into the picture: *de facto*, the churches have become voluntary associations in today's Europe. They are actors in civil society and can mobilize approval and support, but their sympathizers do not translate this approval into an active participation in the life of their local parish. She calls this "vicarious religion."[48]

The forms in which religious communities are formed in today's Europe are more diverse than at any time in the past. The synagogue in Judaism, the church in Christianity, or the mosque in Islam were never in fact the only form in which religious communities took shape; *a fortiori*, however, if we

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[45] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
[46] Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[47] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La Religion pour Mémoire* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993).
[48] "Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge," in: Nancy Ammerman (ed.), *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 21–37.

investigate the forms of religious community today we cannot limit our researches to these institutions, since they no longer offer an exclusive criterion for measuring the degree of secularization. A great variety of organizations today operate in the sphere between the state, economic life, and the private realm. All of these are characterized by a high degree of societal self-organization, and a variety of legal forms regulate their existence. Religious communities, too, profit from this situation, as Gunnar Folke Schuppert writes: "The civil-societal actors in the public sphere include also the religious communities, at least where these […] appear in the plural (and hence as competitors), rather than as a monopolistic state-church."[49] This means that contemporary legal forms applicable to religions are different from the traditional types. In a "confusing landscape of organizations," for which Schuppert elaborates a scale from "private" to "state," there exists a wide spectrum of legal forms for religious communities. The variety is due to the variety in the *de facto* or alleged fulfillment of public tasks.

Thanks to these new legal forms, private religiosity can emerge into the public sphere. For many years, sociologists of religion took privatization as the connecting thread in their investigations of religion in modern society, until José Casanova reversed the argument and demonstrated that the supposedly privatized religions are no longer content today with an existence in the private sphere.[50] Rather, religions articulate in the public sphere of civil society experiences and claims that do indeed have their origin in private experiences and evaluations, but are shared by others—and hence are presented in a communal form. Indignation at wars, protests against the destruction of the environment, etc. bring Christians onto the street and into the NGOs. Casanova sees this "de-privatization" of religiosity as basic to the civil-societal constitution of religions today, and as a factor that to some extent can compensate for detachment from the churches. This civil-societal social form of religion is linked to a new kind of public presence, which is fundamentally different from the traditional state religion. This makes it a specific form of the mobilization of religions, which has not passed Europe by.

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[49] Gunnar Folke Schuppert, "Skala der Rechtsformen für Religion: vom privaten Zirkel zur Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts. Überlegungen zur angemessenen Organisationsform für Religionsgemeinschaften," in: Hans G. Kippenberg & Gunnar Folke Schuppert (eds.), *Die verrechtlichte Religion: Der Öffentlichkeitsstatus von Religionsgemeinschaften* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 11–35, p. 21 (tr. H.G.K.).

[50] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

The criterion of active church membership cannot function in Europe as a measurement of the strength or weakness of religions. If I may permit myself a comparison, Europe has worked on religions as a refinery works on crude oil. Legal, cultural, and societal forms of working on religion have made the foreign religions building-bricks of Europe.

English translation: Brian McNeil

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