SEKÜLERLEŞME VE DİNİ CANLANMA

SEMPOZYUM
(22-23EKİM / OCTOBER 2008 ANKARA)

YAYINA HAZIRLAYAN
Doç. Dr. Ali İsra GÜNGÖR

ANKARA 2008
GERMANY BETWEEN SECULARISM AND NEW RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

Prof. Dr. Peter Antes
Hannover University

In 2000 the famous American theologian Harvey Cox declared in an article that Secularization is "[t]he Myth of the Twentieth Century". Religious resurgence shows everywhere in the world that secularization has come to its end.¹ In the line of this type of thinking, the October-November-December issue of the American liberal humanist journal „free inquiry“ asked in 2005: „Secularism - will it survive?“ - with a well balanced answer of 20 pros and 20 cons. And the February-March issue 2007 of the same journal predicted that Europe would become Muslim.

The aim of this short analysis is to ask: does Germany fit into such a frame of secularism and religious resurgence? The answer will be that both, secular and religious forms of thinking are of an enormous variety so that no simple reply is possible. To prove this, a first step will look at statistics and describe the implications of the change that has taken place in recent years. The second step will explain what happened, in the more general terms of secularization, privatization and individualization. The results of the analysis will be given in the conclusion.

1. Statistics and its implications

In 1950 the statistics² for the Federal Republic of Germany mentioned 50,6 % Protestants, 45,8 % Roman Catholics, and 3,6 % others. In 1987 the percentage was: 42,9 % Roman Catholics, 41,6 % Protestants, 2,7 % Muslims, 11,4 % without any religious adherence, and 1,2 % others. In 1990 there were 36,9 % Protestants, 35,4 % Roman Catholics, 3,7 % Muslims, 22,4 % without any religious adherence, and 1,6 % others. And in 2005 Germany had 31,0 Roman Catholics, 30,8 % Protestants, 32,5 without any religious adherence, 3,9 % Muslims, and 1,8 % others. That means a constant drop of percentages for Roman Catholics and Protestants, a heavy increase of those without any religious adherence and a slight increase of a rather insignificant percentage of Muslims. Consequently, religious adherence to the main churches, i.e. Roman Catholic and Protestants, is in decline while the group of people without any religious adherence is steadily increasing. The latter is partly due to the fact that many people have formally left their church but also to not being baptized anymore. No doubt that a great change has taken place over the last decades that speaks more in favour of secularization than of religious resurgence.

The change shown in the statistics is even more significant if one looks at those in the churches more closely. An empirical study in Basel (Switzerland) of 1993³ has shown that, with the exception of „Humanists without religion“, all the other four types of religious orientation (i.e.

Christians exclusively, Christians of general religiosity, religious Humanists, and religious people with new orientations) are found among both, Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. A similar study of German Protestants came to five types of religious adherence stating that 16% share the religious ideas of the Church and participate actively in its activities, 10% are sceptical of, if not opposed to, the religious ideas of the Church but take actively part in the religious activities of the Church, 13% share the religious ideas of the Church but do not participate in its activities, the majority of 42% consider itself being a bit religious and a bit close to the Church, and 18% are sceptical of, and critical to, the religious ideas and participate nearly never in any religious activities or ceremonies. The consequence of all that is that, as shown in a study about „Kirchenzugehörigkeit und Gottesglaube“ (i.e. belonging to the Church and belief in God), positions such as: „I believe in God as a person“, „I believe in a higher force but not in God“, „I do not believe in God“, „I do not know“ are found among Roman Catholics, Protestants and people without any religion alike though in slightly different percentages. Belonging to a Church, is therefore not sufficient as an indicator for belief in God, nor is it an official declaration such as that of being without any religion. Only members of the „free Churches“ within Protestantism, Orthodox, and Muslims seem to be an exception from this rule, at least for the moment.

The empirical data have shown that the distinction between Church members and people without any religion is not sharp enough to draw the demarcation line between believers and non believers. Both are found on both sides. It seems that a new religious orientation has taken place. It explains why belonging to the Church does not cover religious life in its entirety anymore. It requires more detailed analyses as concerns the reasons for this kind of change.

2. Secularization, privatization, and individualization

The empirical study in Basel referred to above summarizes the results saying that nearly each individual is a special case so that all embracing lifestyles as offered in the classical Roman Catholic Church have no chance to bind people anymore.

From morning to evening every individual has to make decisions of his/her own. No ideal models of behaviour are anymore at his/her disposal. Selfdetermination and individual choices are on the agenda in the professional as well as in the private life. When in former times somebody said he/she is a grammar school teacher many things about the person were already clear: the family background, school education, and perhaps his/her religious adherence. When nowadays in one of Germany's big cities someone is a taxi driver, nothing is clear about him/her. He/she might be of a low education level or might have completed a university formation including a PhD or a Habilitation Doctorate.


4 For Muslims in Germany the variety of positions is certainly much broader than the Muslim organizations make us believe. As an indicator may serve the fact that the integration summit organized by the Minister of the Interior in Berlin in September 2006 made clear that the Muslim organizations all together do not represent more that 15-20% of the Muslims living in Germany. Moreover, a group such as the „Zentralrat der Ex-Muslimen“ (cf. http://www.ex-muslim.de) shows that even an official secession from Islam is not unthinkable in the German context.

4 For that see Michael Klöcker: Katholisch - von der Wiege bis zur Bahre. Eine Lebensmacht im Zerfall?. München: Kösel 1991

285
In the same way as professional activities are individualized, religious lifestyles, also, are privatized. Individualization, therefore, is not only a category for professional orientation and personal lifestyles but for religious options as well. If people from dawn till dark must make their own choices, they make them for their religious worldviews, too. The result is a kind of „patchwork religion“, „religion à bricolage“ or „religion à la carte“. It may contain elements from different religious and non religious traditions such as Christianity and Buddhism but also astrology and sufism. Conversion from one religion to the other is not needed anymore because the spiritual fruits of all religious traditions are accessible in a huge type of religious supermarket in which the fruits alone are on sale from whatever basket they may come. Consequently, more and more people practice Yoga or Tantra, attend suf sessions or Buddhist meditation courses while still continuing their normal church life on Sundays, singing in the parish choir on special occasions.

The variety of individual preferences is particularly noticeable as concerns the „rites of passage“. Wedding ceremonies in churches are highly appreciated though most of the couples have no intention to do what the churches ask them to do for their everyday life. A great variety is also noticed with regard to funerals where even non religious people sometimes wish that prayers should be said and passages from the Bible should be read. In such cases of grief and pain religion provides a vocabulary that gives voice to the voiceless and offers possibilities for expression where ordinary language fails. Therefore, in situations of catastrophes people - religious or not - accept offers of religious services to find an appropriate language and a meaningful response. This was the case after the crash of the Concorde in 2000, after September 11, 2001, after an amok killing of teachers and youngsters in an Erfurt grammar school in 2002 and after the Tsunami on Christmas 2004.

Secularization, privatization, and individualization will go on and produce that each person becomes - to refer to the Basel study - a special case. This implies a broader use of religious and non religious elements whether belonging to one of the Churches will be maintained or inexistent. A visit to one of the big bookshops in one of the German cities will show how close the sections of religion/s, Eastern Wisdom, Esotericism, Alternative Medicine, Magic, and Astrology are put together and this not only in terms of the shelves but of ideas as well.

Conclusion
The previous analysis has shown that an enormous change has taken place in Germany over the last decades. „Patchwork religion“, „religion à bricolage“, „religion à la carte“ is found among Roman Catholics and Protestants as well as among those without any official religion. The demarcation line between believers and non believers, consequently, is not that between people in the Churches and those outside the Churches as in the past where believers belonged to the Churches

---

7 See for that the different articles in Religion in der Lebenswelt der Moderne, ed. by Kristian Fechner and Michael Haspel, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln: W. Kohlhammer 1998
9 See Rüdiger Sachau: Individueller Synkretismus als Lebensform moderner Religiosität. Westliche Reinkarnationsvorstellungen im Kontext neuzzeitlichen Christentums, in Religion in der Lebenswelt der Moderne pp. 67-87
and those without any religion were convinced atheists. Nowadays, each individual seems to make very personal choices in the field of religion, preparing mixtures of all kinds of offers from the supermarket of religious traditions, according to personal tastes and preferences. Therefore Fowid is right in concluding that there is no fundamental change of trend in sight. Secularization will go on and have its effect on all members of society, believers as well as non-believers as long as demographic changes do not change the situation as a whole.¹¹

¹⁰ See in Fowid: „Wiedererstarken der Religionen?“ (i.e. „come back of religions?“), visited on August 11, 2007.
¹¹ 25% of the inhabitants of Hannover/Germany have a migration background in 2007, among the children under 6, however, the percentage is 40% and is even higher in some other German cities. What that means for the German population in 20-30 years time can hardly be predicted but might be of great relevance for demography as well as for religion in Germany. For the conflicts produced by the so called “youth bulge” see Gunnar Heinsohn: Söhne und Weltmacht. Terror im Aufstieg und Fall der Nationen, Zürich: Orell Füssli, 8th ed., 2006