

RELIGION

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In most Western European countries, more and more people no longer belong to a church denomination or attend religious services. These changes, which are called ‘secularization’, can be attributed to economic modernization processes. Just like modernization processes are different for different societies, the process of secularization also is different in different countries. The specific cultural and historical developments of countries are strongly related to the degree in which religion loses its dominant position in society (Wilson, 1998). This means that modernization theory cannot explain all differences between countries. For example the United States, a highly ‘modern’ country, seems to be immune to secularization so far. Furthermore, the story in Eastern Europe and Turkey is completely different. Here, country-specific circumstances and history has led to patterns that deviate from the general trend of secularization.

It has to be noted, that ‘secularization’ is not the same as ‘secularism’. The latter term denotes the separation between religion and the state, and the freedom of religion in general, whereas ‘secularization’ refers to the process that religion is less and less important in people’s daily lives. In addition, the term ‘modern’ is not meant as a judgement (in the sense that a modern society would imply not being backward and underdeveloped), but simply a word to denote that some countries are more economically advanced than others, and that value patterns are more liberal and non-traditional than others. Whether this is a good or a bad thing, is for others to judge.

WESTERN EUROPE

An important explanation for the decreasing influence of religion in the lives of people in Western Europe can be found in the modernization theory. Modernization describes a large number of fundamental social changes: such as an increase in prosperity and the construction of welfare states. With the development of welfare states, security

for people increased. Where previously religion provided certainty for people, now the welfare states offer this certainty and therefore religion has become superfluous. In traditional societies, religion restricted the individual freedoms and religion stipulated or dictated the entire lives of people. Specialisation and professionalization have led to the development of differentiating sets of values in different spheres. As a result, the role of religion decreased in many fields (Dogan, 1995). Moreover, specialized institutions developed, for example in the fields of upbringing, care, and education. As a result, the role of religion has been marginalised.

Modernization processes have also led to an increase in freedom of choice. Together with the increased level of education, the power and authority of traditional authoritarian institutions, such as the church, decreased. This is visible by the large reduction in the number of church visitors and members. This is also indicated in the concept of de-traditionalization. De-traditionalization is characterised by a cultural change, where traditions become less important and where the emphasis increasingly lies on individual freedom, personal autonomy and self-determination.

Secularization can be considered as individualisation in the field of religion. The secularization thesis states that the decreasing influence of religion can be ascribed to the modernization process (Wallis & Bruce, 1992). However, a distinction should be made between the different spheres in which secularization takes place. One can distinguish three dimensions of secularization: the societal, the organizational, and the individual. At the individual level, secularization means the decline of believing in the traditional dogma. At the level of institutions (church) secularization means declining church membership and church attendance. Finally, there is secularization at the societal level, described by the decreasing value of churches and religion in society.

The fact that less people attend church nowadays in comparison to before does not, by definition, mean that people are less religious now than that they were when the churches were full of people. For many people visiting a church was a social duty rather than an expression of their religiosity. On the contrary, it can be assumed that people who now go to church do so due to a personal conviction and because they are religious. It thus seems to be more of an institutional crisis than a religious crisis.

Another explanation comes from the increasing degree of rationalization. According to some, the reduced power of religion can be ascribed to the rationalisation process. The increase in rational thinking has undermined the power of belief in supernatural, mysterious and magical things (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). From then on nature no longer consists of wonders and mysteries. Science and technology provided logical explanations for things that happened to people, and as a consequence, people no longer have to rely on religious declarations and interpretations. Of course, not everything can be explained by logical-rational thinking but, nevertheless, people now less rapidly accept religious declarations for certain phenomena. Religion may still be used when one wants to understand things like depressions, times of extreme stress or the end of life. But overall, technology and science have undermined the power and the authority of religions.

EASTERN EUROPE: THE CASE OF CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA

Under the communist regime, the church was suppressed throughout Czechoslovakia. The present day Czech Republic is the most industrialized, best developed, and most self-conscious part of the former Habsburg Empire (Froese, 2001). Increasing Czech rebellion against Habsburg went alongside an increasing aversion to the Catholic Church that was closely linked to 'Vienna'. On the other hand, present day Slovakia was governed by Hungary, and was less developed, poorer and more agricultural. After the Czechs and the Slovaks merged to form Czechoslovakia in 1918, a growing number of Slovaks felt subordinate to the Czechs. The Catholic Church expressed the sentiments of the Slovaks against the dominant Czechs.

TURKEY

Although officially Islamic, the Ottoman state has for a long time had a secular state system with Islamic law restricted largely to family law and contract law. In fact, secularism has always occupied an important place in Turkish legislation. There has been no official religion since the constitutional amendment of 1924, a division strengthened by the so-called Kemalist state ideology and later by Atatürk, who gave it a central role in the country's modernization. However, in the 1980s influential groups challenged secularism and as a consequence Islamic practices experienced a substantial revival. Still, in spite of the formal separation of state and religion, the Turkish state still exercises strong control over religion, so that the separation between the two looks very similar to a state-church-system, in which state and church cooperate (Tomka, 2005). This historical development has left the country with ties between religion and state that go further than those of any other country in Europe. This may be due to the fact that Turkey as a whole is economically less developed and, therefore, less 'modern' than many other European countries. The fact that most people are religious in Turkey is inherent to the fact that the country has a more 'traditional' value pattern. Moreover, the development of a 'modern' welfare state offers increasing levels of existential security. This reduces the need for reassurance of salvation. In 'traditional' societies, on the other hand, absolute belief systems provide certainties and assurances of salvation, if not in the present world, at least in the next. The people in Turkey cannot take survival and security for granted and, therefore, there is need for a religion on which people can rely.