

## FORMS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY CREATION IN MODERN SOCIETY

Conference at the University of Chicago, October 23–25, 2003. Conveners: Michael Geyer (University of Chicago), Lucian Hölscher (Ruhr University, Bochum), Simone Lässig (GHI), Hartmut Lehmann (Max Planck Institute for History). Participants: Rebecca Bennette (Harvard University), Jim Bjork (Cornell University), Manuel Borutta (Free University Berlin), Susan Crane (University of Arizona), Tobias Dietrich (University of Trier), David Ellis (Augustana College), Ulrike Gleixner (Technical University Berlin), Derek Hastings (Oakland University), Dagmar Herzog (Michigan State University), Lena Inowlocki (University of Frankfurt am Main), Alexander Joskowicz (University of Chicago), Daniel Koehler (University of Chicago), Thomas Mittmann (Ruhr University, Bochum), Rita Paneschar (University of Hamburg), Mark Ruff (Concordia University, Montreal), Thomas Schmidt (University of Leipzig), Tony Steinhoff (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), Todd Weir (Columbia University), Cornelia Wilhelm (Institute for Contemporary History, Munich).

This conference was one in a series focusing on selected aspects of religion and religiosity in modern history. The first two conferences in the series addressed subjects including “Religion and Modernity” and “Religion and Nation.” Concentrating on Europe and Germany, this fall’s event examined the “Creation of Religious Communities” in its diverse forms. Twenty-two American and German historians addressed the question of to what extent religion and religiosity in modern societies can be understood as a continuous process of creation, dissolution, and new formation of religious communities. The conference also strove to find both a methodological approach and a theoretical concept that would allow processes earlier—not always successfully—squeezed into the paradigm of “secularization” to be interpreted in a more sophisticated and appropriate manner. Thus the conference strove to do more than merely reflect the most recent state of scholarship; it also aimed to reveal new dimensions of religious-historical and sociological discussion.

For all presentations, the thematic and methodological point of reference was the trend toward informalization of religious groups, seen for quite some time in nearly all Western nations and in part traceable to the time of the Enlightenment. Based on the recognition that the long-established secularization paradigm has reached its limits and thus can no longer serve as the sole approach to explaining changing religious communities, the conference sought to determine how the never-ending process of new formation and reconstruction of religious communities appears historically, and how this can be appropriately analyzed beyond

the use of traditional social historical methods such as counting the number of formal members (as indicated by baptisms and new church members). Furthermore, conference participants discussed how religious and non-religious communities could best be distinguished in light of the many definitions of "the religious." All participants agreed that a reasonable delimitation of "religious" groups is needed so that not every form of community building is categorized as *religious* community building. At the same time, the concept should be open enough to allow research on entirely new forms of expressing a sense of religious belonging and for the inclusion of groups generally not considered religious, such as the *Freidenker* or professed atheists in the GDR.

In order not to limit the scope of future research by adopting overly hasty and excessively rigid delineations, and as a first step toward the development of an appropriate conceptual framework, the conference initially concentrated on the analysis of the cultural and linguistic practices by which the groups separated themselves from their environment. These included above all 1) the changing ways in which each group identified itself and the "other"; 2) the forms and practices associated with the search for a "transcendent"; 3) the extent and the kind of creation through ritual of a sense of constancy and symbolism through which—going beyond individual experiences and needs—'communities' are established; 4) the social organization that builds on this; and 5) the type and function of these processes of institutionalization, which in turn yield insights regarding the form and requirements of community building. Such an approach makes it possible to identify the benefits people find in religion as well as what specific services religious groups furnish for their members and adherents in modern society.

With these questions as a starting point, all papers concentrated on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nearly all were limited to the field of German history. The first panel, "Forms of Religious Community Creation in the Nineteenth Century," focused on religious outsiders or marginal movements. Susan Crane's contribution "Holy Alliances: Real and Imagined Religious Communities After the Napoleonic Wars" examined Franz von Baader and Ignaz Lindl, two men in czarist Russia who experimented with the formation of new kinds of religious communities that located themselves outside the realm of the Romantic cultural national state. In the end, while Crane's examples were a story of failure, their value comes from their revelations about a social, political, and cultural-religious alternative to the Holy Alliance "from below." This was also true for David Ellis's contribution. His paper, "Re-Enchanting Modernity: The *Erweckungsbewegung* and Rationality in Pomerania in the 1810s and 1820s," presented another ecumenical movement that understood itself as trans-confessional, trans-Atlantic, and even trans-class. The

movement, centered in Prussia's rural and provincial eastern region, consisted primarily of Protestant peasants and handworkers, but also some aristocrats.

Next, Daniel Koehler addressed a Protestant community of an entirely different sort, though he too was interested in a special case. In his paper "Enchanted Protestantism: A Restyling Orthodoxy at Bad Boll, 1850–1880," he analyzed the phenomena of a Protestant place of pilgrimage and a fragile Lutheran-Orthodox "substitute parish" (Ersatzgemeinde) whose attractions transcended borders. Both phenomena were the results of the efforts of the Württemberg pastor Johann Christoph Blumhardt, who during a time of individualization of belief and secularization of religious values offered orthodox Protestants special spiritual experiences and new forms of worship that were both pious and innovative.

Manuel Borutta's paper, "Zur Orientalisierung des Katholizismus im 19. Jahrhundert (1781–1924)" (On the Orientalization of Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century), also examined Protestant responses to modernity. Whereas secularization theory views the separating of politics and religion, of the public sphere and religion, and the state and the church as a process inherent to modernity, Borutta views this differentiation in the context of the European *Kulturkampf*, the roots of which he traces back to the discourse of the Enlightenment. According to Borutta, the orientalization of Catholicism since the end of the eighteenth century had become part of the self-description of modernity, while at the same time Catholicism was excluded from modernity. In this connection it became clear how central a role Catholicism played as a negative model for the self-understanding of the Enlightenment and the liberal movement.

That this phenomenon, by 1870 at the latest, was no longer an exclusively Protestant one was demonstrated conclusively by Alexander Joskowitz in his paper, "The Religion of Humanity in the Fight Against Ultramontanism: Jewish Identity Politics and anti-Catholicism in the German *Kulturkampf*." The German Reform Jews, too, used Catholicism as a symbol of the "other" in order to create a positive image of Judaism, which just a few decades before had been burdened with similar stereotypes as Catholicism. Like Borutta, Joskowitz was interested less in the cultural practice in the parishes than in the discourse expressed in selected organs of Reform Judaism and in Jewish neo-orthodoxy. It was significant that Jewish anti-ultramontanism, which before 1871 already played an important role in Jewish identity formation, was given a further-reaching function in the *Kulturkampf*. This anti-ultramontanism was a version of liberal anticlericalism, but it was also something more: As the Jewish press portrayed Catholicism as a hierarchical, party-political, and authoritarian enemy of every true religion, an individual vision of a

Jewish religion took form that was to a large degree compatible with modernity. In his comments, Hartmut Lehman called attention to the great fluidity of new forms of religious communities in the nineteenth century and addressed the role of pronounced non-conformists. He also gave some first thoughts regarding a typology of processes of community creation.

In the next panel, entitled "Weibliche und männliche Formen religiöser Vergemeinschaftung" (Masculine and Feminine Forms of Religious Community Creation), the perspective provided by gender history took center stage. Masculine forms, however, played only a secondary role in the presentations; for the most part, the panel was shaped by the issue of the feminization of religion, which has barely begun to be explored in research on Catholicism or Judaism. Remarkably, though this did not shape the discussion, the findings varied clearly for the individual denominations. Ulrike Gleixner's presentation "Vom familialen Totengedenken zur männlichen Genealogie: Pietistisches Bürgertum und Traditionsstiftung in Württemberg" (From Family Commemoration of the Dead to Masculine Genealogy: The Pietist Middle-Class and the Creation of Tradition in Württemberg) concluded that, with the formation of middle-class society, women were systematically "written out" of the masculine meta-narrative and hence lost to the religious memory of the community. Simone Lässig's presentation "Religiöse Modernisierung, Geschlechterdiskurs und kulturelle Verbürgerlichung" (Religious Modernization, Gender Discourse and Cultural Bourgeoisification) showed that for the German Jews of the early nineteenth century, the process worked in the opposite direction. The Jewish religion's modernization and establishment as part of bourgeois society rested on a devaluation of the masculine culture of Talmudic study and on an increase in value of aspects of religious practices such as emotionality that contemporary discourse categorized as feminine.

Gender symbols also played a central role in Rebecca Bennette's presentation, though she was less interested in cultural practice than in the gender images shaping the characteristics that nineteenth-century German Catholicism ascribed to itself and to the other. In her paper "Role Reversal: Feminine Imagery and Activity among Catholics During the Nineteenth Century," Bennette showed that negative stereotypes such as those formed by Prussian Protestantism about Catholics were gradually adopted by the Catholic side, transformed, and reinterpreted. Now it was Catholics themselves who self-confidently and even positively defined and portrayed themselves and their ideal of the nation as feminine.

This process of reinterpretation also found reflection in Derek Hastings's report on "Nation, Race, and Gender: The Formation of Progressive Catholic Identity in Imperial Germany," in which the limits of the

established milieu concept clearly came to light. At the center of analysis stood the “progressive Catholics” of Munich, a group rooted in the university-educated bourgeoisie and doubtless on the margin of the Catholic “milieu.” The analysis of such a fringe group demonstrates how geographically, socially, and culturally diverse German pre-war Catholicism was, and shows how ill-suited the old milieu concept is for illuminating the complex processes of Catholic community formation in the Kaiserreich.

The third panel was entitled “Formen religiöser Vergemeinschaftung in der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert” (Forms of Religious Community Creation in the Transition to the Twentieth Century). The seven papers presented in this panel covered a very wide field of study originally dominated by Protestants. The spectrum ranged from the Nietzsche cult to the *Freidenker* in the Kaiserreich to Volkish groups around 1900 and Jewish fraternal orders to the phenomenon of “village religion,” from popular piety in Upper Silesia to a paper that brought a European perspective to bear. Thomas Mittmann’s paper “God is Dead—Long Live Religion: Ernst Honeffer’s Concept of Neopaganism as an Example of Nietzschean Religion in Fin-de-Siècle Germany” showed the high degree to which the radical atheist Nietzsche was read “religiously” and thereby became a source of religious reformation and renewal. The resultant “religion of this world” with no place for a transcendent God was particularly attractive to the Protestant educated middle class, which sought not secularization, but an individualized religiosity beyond the established Protestant churches.

This search for new forms of community creation outside the narrow limits that, as a result of theological controversies, threatened to become institutionalized in Judaism too provided the theme for Cornelia Wilhelm’s paper, “Fraternal Organization as Model for Modern Jewish Community.” The paper focused on Jews in America, showing their German roots. Here, the Order of B’nai B’rith was charged with an exceedingly important integrative function: the formation of a Jewish identity that took place parallel to the individualization of the life world and transcended religious fault lines, that promoted communal cooperation as well as the integration of all Jews into the American nation.

In his paper “The Secularization of Religious Dissent: Anticlerical Politics and the *Freigeistige* Movement in Germany,” Todd Weir gave broad insights into the development of political and civil religions from 1844 to 1933. Weir advanced the provocative thesis that a relational model is clearly superior to the secularization approach. According to this view, the anticlericalism and the secular religiosity typical of the Free Religious movement must be understood as “negative dependence” on the dominant order. As long as the dominant order united state and clerical authority, neither the Free Religious movement nor the radi-

cal utopian political communities could truly become secularized. Rita Paneschar's contribution "Bund, Hochschule, Kulturrat oder Orden? Religiöse Vergemeinschaftung in völkischen Zeitschriften um 1900" (Association, University, Cultural Council, or Holy Order? Religious Community Creation in Nationalist Newspapers around 1900) examined the German Christian periodical *Volkserzieher*, which exemplified the many new cultural offerings of a sense of purpose to life that emerged from German society around 1900 and moved beyond mere discourse to establish community.

Jim Bjork was less interested in exploring the new developments that emerged out of the confrontation with modernity; instead, he analyzed real or supposed inertial forces in the field of religion. In his contribution "Black Silesia: Popular Piety and the Industrial Landscape," Bjork adopted a grassroots perspective that allowed him to explore everyday religious practices in a Catholic industrial region and to question old assumptions about the "natural" religious obedience of the Upper Silesians as well as assumptions equating religiosity with loyalty to and affiliation with the church.

Tobias Dietrich posed the question "Village as Religion or Religion in the Village? Some Remarks on Rural Life (1850 to 1930)." Drawing on the concept of civil religion, Dietrich developed the idea of "village religion" as a suitable concept to describe the village life world, where he was able to uncover parallels to phenomena generally associated with large cities. This applied above all to the stubbornly independent character of religious culture, which increasingly removed itself from the control of the church as an institution and developed special rites and practices, as well as the denominational neutrality typical for many village parishes. In light of this, Dietrich called for the application in future research of "village religion" as a new and original analytical concept.

Anthony Steinhoff's paper, entitled "Building Religious Community in Modern Urban Europe," provided a precise overview of the essentials of the relevant research controversies and located them in their European context. In contrast to Dietrich, Steinhoff in his paper primarily examined the urban environment. Here, too, urbanization did not mark the end of religion, as suggested by secularization theory, but rather provoked a change in form and a concomitant pluralization of the religious that occurred via the creation of new forms of "community." This in turn made it possible—as Dietrich found for the village—to live "religiously" without attending church and without direct contact with priests, pastors, or rabbis, and to form a feeling of religious belonging outside traditional institutions. Here, as with most of the other papers in this panel, it became clear that the concept of religious community creation is currently

most suitable for those groups with roots in Protestantism or the Protestant milieu.

This also was shown in the final panel, entitled "Formen religiöser Vergemeinschaftung nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg" (Forms of Religious Community Creation After the Second World War). In her paper "Believing in God as Atheist: Left Wing Theology and the Confrontation with Secularization," Dagmar Herzog examined Dorothee Soelle, the fascinating figure whose work Herzog interpreted as a key example of the creation of new religious communities and the revitalization of Western Christianity in the modern era. Among the fundamental issues Herzog raised was the tendency toward secularization inherent in Christianity and the interwoven "Christian defensiveness," without which the phenomenon of anti-Semitism is difficult to explain, as well as the revitalized connection between politics and religion on both the Left and the Right.

In the broadest sense, this issue was also addressed in Thomas Schmidt's paper "Civil Religion in the GDR," in which Schmidt applied the concept of civil religion to "the most secularized region in the world." In his view, secularization was so far-reaching and so apparently lasting because the state supplied the functional equivalent of traditional Christian religion. Above all, this was the intent of rituals such as the *Jugendweihe* (the GDR ceremony in which fourteen-year-olds were given the social status of adults), while the formation of a civil religion sanctifying labor and justice must be judged to be more of an autonomous process not intentionally controlled by the state. Nevertheless, with the end of the GDR, its basic structures disappeared as well. Although central values and rituals are demonstrating a remarkable staying power, still, the transcendental dimension and with it the religious character of the civil religion were lost upon the collapse of the socialist system.

The topic of dissolution was further explored by Mark Ruff. In his paper "A Religious Vacuum: The post-Catholic Milieu in Germany," he agreed with proponents of secularization theory in their description of Western Europe as a wasteland as seen from a Christian perspective. But according to Ruff, the religiosity of many non-Christian immigrant groups proves that this was not a result of secularization resulting as a necessary consequence of modernity, but at the most a de-Christianization of *Lebenswelten*. But Ruff also criticized an excessively one-dimensional understanding of "form change": Contrary to the thesis that church ties decline, but not faith, he pointed to the example of German Catholics, especially in the realm of sexuality, where Christian values as represented by the church no longer have much impact on daily life. According to Ruff, Catholics too have long been on the path from collective faith to individualism.

Processes working in the opposite direction, namely the rise of a new orthodoxy, were portrayed in Lena Inowlocki's paper "Covering Hair, Disclosing Identity: Individual and Collective Aspects of Religious Practice." Her study was based on interviews with women from three generations of Jewish families who came to Germany or the Netherlands by way of Displaced Person Camps. In this connection, she pointed to the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of a turn to orthodoxy that obviously was not expected or in any way imparted by the previous generation. Inowlocki did not describe this turn to orthodoxy as a mere return to discarded cultural practices, but rather as a fitting answer to a phenomenon described in many other conference contributions: individualization and, above all for minority religions, the passing on of the responsibility for the continued existence of the community as a whole.

In the concluding panel of the conference, the discussion centered on the value of different theoretical approaches from which the community building paradigm necessarily derives. While the concept of confession-alization was hinted at, but not systematically discussed, secularization theory provoked a debate that would have been a meaningful and useful starting point for the conference as well. While Geyer and Hoelscher declared the hitherto dominant paradigm dead and asserted that the community building approach had much greater analytical power, Schmidt saw in secularization theory—which Steinhoff described as an "invincible gorilla"—an approach that now as before could continue to be useful. In this respect, the concluding discussion left a similar impression as the meeting as a whole: Hoelscher's question regarding the forms of religious community formation presented a stimulating new concept, and the participants illuminated the process of religious community creation between 1800 and 2000 in stimulating ways. Likewise, the approach to "community/parish" outside of the typical understanding of the church must be seen as an important result of the debates, and the cultural and symbolic dimensions of the formation and stabilization of religious groups were given a gratifyingly prominent status. Nevertheless, the individual papers and panels remained somewhat unconnected. It seems that the consistent application of religious-historical analyses to the paradigm of religious community creation that served as the subject of this conference must remain a project for the future. Nevertheless, the conference performed very important advance work for this task.

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