Conveners:
Uta A. Balbier, German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.
Wilhelm Damberg, Bochum University
Lucian Hoelscher, Bochum University
Mark Ruff, Saint Louis University

Venue: German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.
Dates: March 17-19, 2011

Call for Papers:
Secularization and the Transformation of Religion in the U.S. and Germany after 1945

At first glance, the religious landscapes of the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States would seem to be worlds apart. Religion appears to play a much more significant role in the American public arena than in the German. Televangelists, radio evangelists, Roman Catholic bishops and evangelicals have flexed their political muscle and have become important players in American political life. The United States records higher rates of attendance at church and mass. In fact, however, religious institutions in both societies have had to struggle with similar challenges – emerging multi-religious realities, strong secular movements and declining membership rosters, processes that they often subsume under the heading of “secularization.” Religious bodies in both nations have had to recognize that they operate in a competitive media-driven cultural and religious marketplace, even if the transformations emerging in this new environment are not as outwardly visible in Germany as in the United States.

This international conference seeks to explore the history and meaning of secularization and the transformation of the religious landscape of both the United States and Germany after 1945. It will challenge traditional narratives that focus on the disappearance of religion in modernity and instead highlight the transformation of religion within larger societal changes. Our approach is transnational, inter-disciplinary, and multi-confessional.

The conference will focus on modernization processes in U.S. and German religious life after 1945, when churches in both countries were increasingly challenged by rapid changes in the societies around them. The rise of television, the development of new forms of public discourse, and processes like democratization, liberalization and the increased influence of science all influenced and transformed the self-understanding of religious bodies and produced new forms of religious life and discourse.

We hope that the transatlantic perspective of the conference will help us to clarify the difference between the two cultures, but also to recognize comparable processes and reciprocal transfers and influences. The discussions between American and German scholars
will help illuminate different understandings of secularization, religious communities, and religious freedom and encourage a future transatlantic dialogue on religion and its role in modern societies.

We invite experts and young scholars from different disciplines to address some of the following topics:

- Religion and social transformation: How has the religious landscape changed since 1945? What new institutional structures and forms of socialization have developed in the religious sector? How are these changes intertwined with changes in the understanding of nation, community, etc.? How have new forms of community building been influenced by religious dynamics and vice versa? How have these changed the self-understanding of laymen, clergy, and believers?

- Religion, consumerism, and the media: Has the rise of consumerism changed the relationship between individuals and religious institutions? Has it led to the development of a religious marketplace in both societies? Has the rise of the media and a culture of entertainment and consumption produced new forms of religious community on both sides of the Atlantic?

- Religion and politics: How has the relationship between church and state in both countries changed since 1945? How have the churches expressed and exerted themselves politically? What has been the relationship between religious bodies and larger political movements? How have changes in the structure and self-understanding of parishes reflected and spurred on larger political and social transformations in the world around them?

Abstracts (2 pages max.) should be submitted along with a short C.V. by November 1, 2010, to Baerbel Thomas (b.thomas@ghi-dc.org).

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