

Annual International Lecture on Religion

Secularization theory: Theoretically and empirically reconsidered

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Goldsmiths, University of London, Professor Stuart Hall Building, PSH 326
1 May 2018, 6pm with wine reception

Sociology at Goldsmiths, home to the new BA Religion, invites you to the Annual International Lecture on Religion.

In the social sciences a new discourse on religion in modern societies has established itself. It is no longer the master narrative that religion is waning in significance that dominates the perspectives in the social sciences. The new key words are 'Return of the gods' (Friedrich Wilhelm Graf), 'Re-enchantment of the world' (Ulrich Beck), Desecularization (Peter L. Berger).

Since criticizing the secularization theory often has a great deal to do with scaremongering, what is required firstly is as precise a reconstruction as possible of what secularization theory is actually saying. The talk in its first part provides a reconstruction of the propositional content of secularization theory and deals with the various meanings and criticisms of this concept.

The second part presents two alternative theoretical approaches widely used in sociology of religion: the individualization thesis and the economic market model. In its final part the talk applies the theoretical approaches to empirical data by doing a comparison between the US and Western Europe. Whereas the United States is characterized by high levels of religiosity Western Europe displays clear signs of secularization. Which of the theoretical

approaches contributes most in explaining the differences between them?

Biography

Detlef Pollack has been a Professor of Sociology of Religion at Münster University since 2008. He was a fellow of the Institute of Advanced Study in Berlin in 1996/97 and held the position of Max Weber Chair at New York University between 2003 and 2005. Areas of his research have focused on the sociology of religion, political culture in reunified Germany, democratization in Eastern Europe, new social movements, and systems theory. Currently, he is the speaker of the Cluster of Excellence at Muenster University "Religion and Politics" and has most recently published "Religion and Modernity: An International Comparison" (together with Gergely Rosta) with Oxford University Press.

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