A SILENT BATTLE: THEORIZING THE EFFECTS OF COMPETITION BETWEEN CHURCHES AND SECULAR INSTITUTIONS*

JÖRG STOLZ
UNIVERSITY OF LAUSANNE

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This paper proposes a theory of religious and secular competition, focusing specifically on western democracies. The article shows that a wide variety of empirically observed phenomena can be explained as aggregated outcomes of individual rational adaptations to different states of competition between religious and secular institutions. The theory presented builds on a new typology of church goods, the concept of "social production functions," and the distinction of two types of competition between the religious and the secular. Among the examples that are accounted for by the theory are shortages of priests, waves of disaffiliations, drops in church attendance even of committed members, high religiosity in the USA and in agrarian countries and others. I conclude with methodological suggestions for future empirical research.

> *"Any thoughtful reflection on the last elements of meaningful human activity is first of all bound to the categories of 'ends' and 'means.'"*
>
> *Max Weber*

> *"In the Netherlands, churches were not simply engaged in competition with each other; the religious economy itself was exposed to competitive pressure."*
>
> *Frank Lechner*

> *"Many clergy members stressed that they think soccer is a great sport, which provides many benefits to children. But they object to games that are scheduled at times that force young people to choose between sports and religion."*
>
> *Kate Stone Lombardi, New York Times*

INTRODUCTION

To church officials and many laypersons alike, it is almost common sense to say that Christian churches in modern societies face tough competition not only from other religious groups but also from all sorts of secular institutions. Churches have to compete for members, attention, money, and resources with a host of secular organizations (such as secular clubs, psychological counseling, or leisure activities), and even their most spe-

cialized activities such as marriage or burial rituals meet increasing secular competition. Yet, the three most important theories that try to make sense of religion in modernity—secularization theory, individualization theory, and market theory—have all, albeit in very different ways, failed to grasp this essential point. Neither have they satisfactorily described the competition, showing that individuals may "opt out" of religion by switching to secular alternatives (or vice versa), nor have they used this central micro-mechanism in order to build an explanatory theory that might account for a host of readily observable phenomena (Stolz 2008a). This paper attempts to sketch a theory of religious and secular competition, focusing specifically on the case of Christian churches in western democracies. I argue that Christian churches are engaged in a "silent battle" with their secular competitors—a battle they frequently lose. In fact, much of what is currently described as European "secularization" works through aggregated individual "exits" from the religious into the secular. This is a relatively quiet matter and not as openly conflict-laden as the historically earlier secularization of political and societal structures (e.g. in the *Kulturkampf*). I argue that a wide variety of both general and specific findings in the literature, such as the waning of Mass attendance in Australia, waves of church disaffiliation in Germany, the drop in ordinations in Spain, as well as the strong religiosity in the USA and agrarian countries, can all be explained—to some extent—by the present theoretical framework. Hence, the article examines a certain causal mechanism, namely the effect of the religious/secular opportunity structure in a given society, sub-society, or social group, on individuals' actions. It argues that this is an important causal mechanism, among others, that helps to explain the empirical regularities observed. I will respond to the following theoretical *central question:* To what extent and concerning what "goods" do Christian churches face competition by secular institutions? How does this competition influence individual beliefs, preferences and actions, and—through aggregation—social explananda? In order to address this question, part 2 sketches the three most prominent theories (secularization theory, individualization theory, market theory) and shows how they have—in spite of important insights—failed to address satisfactorily the fact of religious and secular competition. Part 3 presents the new theory of religious and secular competition, by listing the (intermediary and final) "goods" of churches, identifying their secular competitors, looking at individual choice, and sketching some important socio-historic parameters influencing the competition. Part 4 looks at various empirical findings that can be explained with the help of this framework and treats methodological questions. Part 5 concludes with some limits and possible extensions of the framework.

FORMER THEORETICAL ATTEMPTS

In what follows, I show that the three most important theories treating religion in modernity have so far all failed to grasp the point that, depending on various societal conditions, individuals may opt out of religion by choosing secular alternatives (or vice versa).[1]

SECULARIZATION THEORY

Very briefly summarized, secularization theory claims that modernization, a multi-faceted process including rationalization, differentiation, and societalization, leads to secularization (Wallis and Bruce 1995, Bruce 2002, Voas 2008).[2] It describes on a macro-level how various societal institutions (such as a legal system, modern medicine, a political system,

leisure opportunities, etc.) arise, which are then said to "replace" religion in their respective spheres. In this vein, Brian Wilson (1982:36 ff.) explains that, in modern societies, all of the "latent functions" that religion used to fulfill in medieval societies (such as control of behavior, socialization of children, interpretation of the universe) are being "taken over" by other, secular institutions. The replacement occurs, according to Wilson, since secular institutions are based on scientific knowledge and technology and are more specific, rationalized, and effective than the former, diffuse, and multi-functional, religious version.

We may note that this approach does not describe competition between religious and secular institutions, but rather a continuing and complete *replacement* of religious by secular institutions (which may include, of course, conflict in the transition phase). Secularization theory of the Wilson type has—in my view—two important shortcomings that are both linked to the Parsonian macro-perspective on which it is built. First, secularization theory obscures ongoing secular and religious competition. True, in modern societies we often find secular institutions that "fulfill functions" formerly linked to religion. However, Wilson fails to notice that in modern societies religious groups still produce goods with just these "functions" and that we are faced—in practically all the arenas he mentions—with competing secular *and* religious offers. Second, secularization theory is—again in line with the functionalist macro-thinking of those years—not explanatory. It describes macro-processes without specifying actor-based mechanisms and processes that may be thought to produce the phenomena in question.

INDIVIDUALIZATION THEORY

Individualization theory states that modernization leads not to secularization, but to a change of religious forms (Pollack 2008:6).[3] While institutionally based religion is decreasing, new forms of non-institutional religion are emerging. These new forms that give "ultimate meaning" are organized around the "private sphere," and individuals may choose and combine them according to their personal preferences. Examples of such themes are positive thinking, popularized psychology, tourism, sports, certain forms of pop music and sexuality, social mobility, family life, and any search for self-realization. From themes such as these, individuals will construct their highly unstable and very personal version of "sacred cosmos" (Luckmann 1967). It is interesting to note that we find something similar to a description of the competition between religious and secular goods in individualization theory. Thus, Thomas Luckmann describes how Christian churches lose their monopoly on providing "ultimate meaning" and have to compete with "secondary institutions" (such as the mass media, pop music, popular psychology):

> "They [specialized religious institutions JS] are forced to compete, instead, with many other sources of "ultimate" significance for the attention of "autonomous" individuals who are potential consumers of their "product". (Luckmann 1967:107)

Individualization theorists have thus seen the important point of religious and secular competition. Unfortunately, they have failed to put this observation to good use due to two theoretical shortcomings. First, they have used a very broad functional definition of religion, which led them to conceptualize all the secular competitors of churches as "forms of (albeit invisible) religion." This, of course, makes it impossible to describe changes in the importance of religion in given societies. Since anything that fulfills the same function as religion

is—by definition—religion, the "demand" for religion cannot vary. Second, as in secularization theory, they have placed great emphasis on description and interpretation, probably because of the phenomenological background of individualization theory; however, they have omitted to construct explanatory theory.

MARKET THEORY

A third approach that has treated the possible competition between religious and secular goods is what I here call the "market theory."[4] According to market theory, we have to suppose a "religious economy" in which competing religious groups (or "religious firms") offer "religious products" (Stark and Finke 2000; Stark and Iannaccone 1994). A central premise of the theory is that individuals strive for "rewards," that is "anything humans will incur costs to obtain" (Stark and Bainbridge 1989:27). Rewards can be of very different kinds; they might be "this-worldly," such as consumer goods, money, and social contacts, or "other-worldly," such as an afterlife or illumination. These latter rewards "will be obtained only in a non-empirical (usually posthumous) context" (Stark and Finke 2000:88). Since "rewards are scarce, or are not directly available at all, humans will tend to formulate and accept explanations for obtaining the reward in the distant future or in some other non-verifiable context" (Stark and Finke 2000:88). These "explanations" (in an earlier version of the theory they were called "compensators") are the main "stuff" of which religion is made. In other words, religious organizations create explanations suggesting that individuals may receive later what they do not have now. In addition, religious organizations also offer this-worldly rewards such as "human companionship, status as an upright person of good character, leisure and recreational activity, opportunities for marriage, courtship, and business contacts ..." (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:11). Since its early days, market theory has incorporated an element of competition between the religious and the secular. Stark and Finke (2000:90) state, "Humans will not have recourse to the supernatural when a cheaper or more efficient alternative is known and available." Interestingly, we see a clear parallel to the Wilson argument that secular goods may be more attractive since they are more efficient and secure. Another promising attempt to look at religious and secular competition is presented by Iannaccone (1997), when he looks at religious and secular "commodities" that may be produced by households, choosing just how much to produce of each type. However, again, a theoretical shortcoming has prevented the theory from capturing the competition between the secular and the religious in a useful way. In fact, on the level of society in general, Stark, Bainbridge, Finke, and Iannaccone assume a *stable religious demand.* They justify this assumption by arguing that rewards in all societies are necessarily scarce, and that individuals will always desire rewards they do not posses and that might not even "exist in the natural world" (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:12, Stark and Iannaccone 1994). Theoretically, this leads to two interesting (and theoretically doubtful) consequences. First, in an unregulated market, the overall amount of religion will remain roughly on the same level over time. For, if one religious group undergoes internal secularization, this will automatically create an unmet demand that other groups may exploit. Second, the religious market is assumed to be "closed." Since religious demand is of a very special kind, involving transcendent goods, only religious institutions are considered able to meet it; consequently, they compete among themselves on a "religious market." As we can see, competition between the secular and the religious on a societal level is *excluded by definition.* Note that, in the light of the general theory, this assumption appears somewhat paradoxical since it

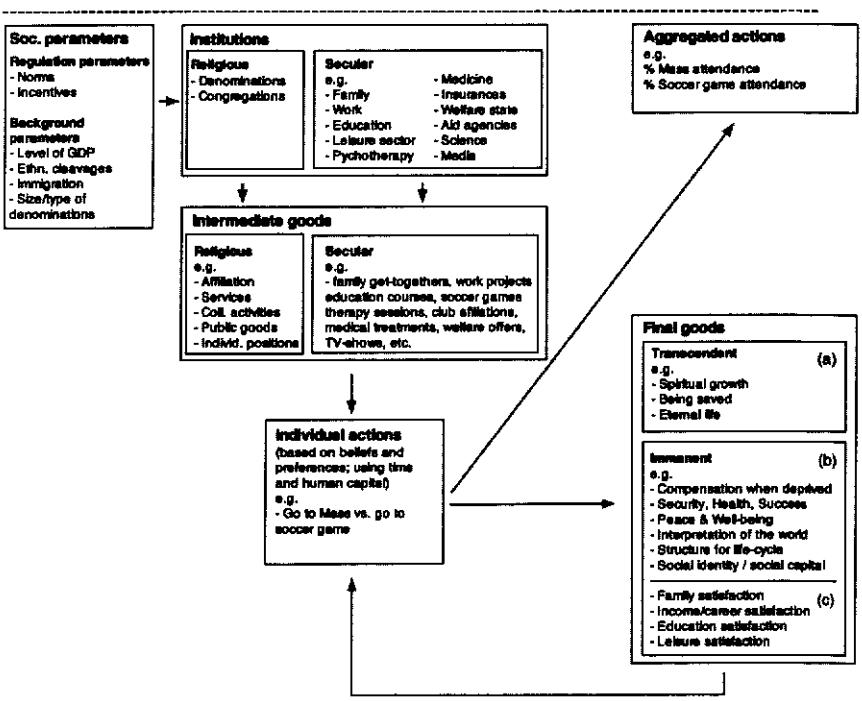
contradicts the idea that individuals will choose "cheaper" secular alternatives if available and the religious and secular commodities approach (Iannaccone 1990, 1997).[5]

We thus come to the somewhat astounding conclusion that the three most important theories explaining the fate of religion in modernity have all more or less obscured the fact that individuals might change from religious to secular goods or vice versa. Secularization theory postulates a complete replacement of "latent functions" of religion by secular institutions; individualization theory employs an all-inclusive definition of religion; and market theory assumes a stable religious demand. In what follows, I will therefore try to formulate a sociological theory of religious and secular competition that avoids the problems encountered in the three theories reviewed.

A THEORY OF COMPETITION BETWEEN CHURCHES AND SECULAR INSTITUTIONS

In what follows, I sketch the new theory of religious and secular competition that—as readers will note—diverges in many ways from the three classical theories reviewed above. Important papers that have suggested the direction here proposed are Azzi and Ehrenberg (1975), as well as the seminal work by Laurence Iannaccone (1990, 1997) and Gill and Lundsgaarde (2004). The different elements of the theory can be inspected in figure 1. We

Figure 1 The Elements of the theory of religious and secular competition



have to start with four basic concepts serving as a foundation for the theory: a general explanatory framework, the definition of religion, the notion of social production functions, and the concept of churches as voluntary associations.

BASIC CONCEPTS

SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATION.

A first basic concept for my theory is that of "sociological explanation." Here, I build on Boudon (2003) and Coleman (1990), who argue that explanations are not just descriptions, typologies, or "conceptual frameworks," but very concrete answers to "why-questions." A phenomenon is said to be explained if one can show how it results from a set of initial conditions and a generative (and therefore causal) mechanism (Hedström and Swedberg 1998). The "social causality" incorporates three elements (Esser 1999).[6] First is the situation, characterized by opportunities, norms, and cultural frames. Second, individuals react to this situation on the basis of their beliefs and preferences. Third, the individual actions may have—notably through interaction—various intended and unintended aggregated effects. As sociologists, we try to explain these latter aggregated effects.[7] Another way of referring to this three-step approach is to say that we attempt macro-micro-macro explanations. Concerning the second point in this triad, note that our model assumes a (weak) form of rationality concerning beliefs, preferences, and action. We make the following three assumptions. The first, concerning beliefs, is that given the evidence individuals will opt for the most plausible hypothesis about reality. The second, concerning preferences, is that individuals choose some of their goals rationally, reflecting on how much "utility" it will mean to reach a particular goal (this will be explained more fully below in connection with "social production functions"). The third, concerning action, is that individuals try to make "reasonable choices" on the basis of their preferences and beliefs that seem, in their eyes, to further their interests. I acknowledge that specific individuals and groups may at times hold wildly false beliefs, choose goals that are clearly self-defeating, and act contrary to their preferences (Boudon 1998). However, I argue that for the explanations here proposed it suffices that rationality is a common element of the beliefs, preferences, and actions of many individuals. If this is so, then idiosyncratic beliefs, preferences, and actions—in the aggregate—will cancel out, and the rational tendencies—due to the "law of large number"—will create the macro-outcome (Goldthorpe 2000:116).

THE DEFINITION OF RELIGION.

A second basic concept is my definition of religion: *Religion* denotes the whole of cultural symbol-systems that respond to problems of meaning and contingency by alluding to a transcendent reality, which influences everyday life but cannot be directly controlled. Religious symbol-systems incorporate mythical, ethical, and ritual elements as well as "salvation goods" (see for similar definitions: Geertz 1993; Pollack 2003).[8] Using this definition, membership in a Methodist denomination, a celebration of a service in church, participation in street evangelization, or prayer to a god are religious phenomena, while tourism, sports, pop music, and sexuality can safely be called *secular*.[9] Acknowledging the fact that boundaries may be difficult to draw in some cases, our definition has the advantage of being close to common usage and has been proved reasonably easy to apply.

CHURCHES AS VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS.

A third building block is to view Christian churches as special types of *voluntary membership associations*. Such associations are non-profit social groups in which members come together to create benefits for members and/or society (Harris 1998; Warner 1998). Apart from religious congregations, examples of voluntary associations are "self-help groups, professional associations, trade associations, trade unions, neighborhood associations, leisure groupings and community action groups" (Harris 1998:607). Voluntary associations have many attributes that set them apart from commercial firms. The attribute that is most important for our purposes is that they normally do not sell "private goods" on markets. Rather, they produce (a) different services and collective activities for their members as well as (b) public goods for society or groups in need.[10]

SOCIAL PRODUCTION FUNCTIONS.

A fourth basic concept (that will help to build a useful typology of religious and secular goods) is the notion of "social production function." Social production functions can be described as chains of means-and-ends relationships, institutionally and culturally defined, enabling individuals in a given society or social group to satisfy their basic needs by using their resources in a rational way (Esser 1999:75; Lindenberg 1989).[11] They link intermediate goods, final goods, and needs. The central idea of this theory is that individuals are not seen as consumers but as producers (Stigler and Becker 1995[1977], Becker and Michael 1990[1976]). This idea was first applied to religious phenomena by Iannaccone (1990, 1997). Thus, individuals satisfy their needs by producing "final goods," which in turn are created through "intermediate goods." Intermediate goods include objects, services, collective activities, etc., as well as time and various forms of capital (monetary, human, and social). They often include many further means-and-ends chains of intermediate production. The final goods, the intermediate goods, as well as their relationships and manners of production, are defined and institutionalized on a group or societal level, and they often depend greatly on the technical attributes of the good in question. Social groups and cultures thus tell us what we should want to obtain and how we should go about achieving this. Individuals cannot change these functions at will. An example may make this clearer. Scholars can satisfy their human need for recognition (at least in the professional arena) only by the final good, "reputation."[12] This good may be produced through the intermediate goods of publishing articles in high-ranked journals, delivering keynote addresses at international congresses, occupying prestigious chairs in their particular field, and so forth. These intermediate goods themselves involve many other means-and-ends relationships of production, e.g. for the publishing of an article: getting the research funds, reading the literature, doing the research, writing up the paper, etc. Professional sports, family life, or "being a good Muslim" would again have very different "social production functions." Yet despite the great differences between these examples, in every case culture and institutions tell the individual how to use certain legitimate *intermediate goods* in clearly specified combinations in order to produce certain legitimate *final goods* that are again to be used in certain amounts and combinations in order to satisfy individual *needs*. The theory of social production functions should be used as a heuristic in order to identify different intermediate and final goods in given socio-historical settings (Lindenberg and Frey 1993). In what follows, I apply this idea of "social production functions" to religious goods, identifying

intermediate and final church goods. This should help us with our central question concerning the competition between churches and secular institutions.

TYPES OF GOOD

At this point, and building on the concepts reviewed above, we can take a closer look at what "goods" Christian churches produce from a sociological viewpoint. A "good" may be defined as a resource that individuals can use in order to satisfy a need or to produce a certain return (Esser 2000:165). My concept uses the insights made available by the distinction between intermediate and final goods inherent in social production functions. Acknowledging substantial differences between different Christian traditions and geographical and cultural contexts, I propose a typology of *intermediate church goods* that the churches distribute directly.

INTERMEDIATE GOODS.

(1) Affiliation is a good that includes certain rights and duties, while providing social utility, and which is "paid for" by contributions in the form of money, time, energy, and participation. Through baptism, individuals may become Christians and they may then become parish or congregation members, enabling them to benefit from certain services and inclusion in a community.

(2) Services are church goods that are often cherished even among individuals who otherwise have little contact with churches. A service can be defined as an action that a person, or a group of persons, executes and that responds to the needs of the beneficiaries of these services (Kotler 1975). Examples of such services in the case of Christian churches are baptisms, weddings, funerals, interviews with a chaplain, visits by a priest to the elderly as well as religious education and instruction, especially of children.

(3) Collective activities (or "communal goods") are goods that the members produce in common. Production of these activities can occur only if several individuals collaborate with the goal of forming a convivial community, through common action and experience (Esser 2000:170). As examples, we can cite religious services, common prayers, religious celebrations, and church choirs.

(4) *Public goods* are goods not restricted to use by members but aimed at the wider public or special groups in need. In the Christian context, we could think of deacon activities, support for foreigners, aid for natural disasters, cooperation in development, and missions, in addition to the transmission of values (neighborly love, a particular sexual morality, family values, equal rights, etc.).

(5) Individual positions inside the churches may also be seen as goods. Examples are volunteer positions such as elder, catechist, church musician, etc. or professional positions such as bishop, pastor, deacon, etc. Again, these goods include rights and duties. In the case of a volunteer position, the individual receives "remuneration" through social status, esteem, and the feeling of having accomplished something worthwhile. In the case of a professional position, the work is remunerated financially, in addition to the social status that goes with the position.[13]

TRANSCENDENT AND IMMANENT FINAL GOODS.

Individuals may now use the intermediate goods, together with monetary, human, social, and religious capital, as well as time, in order to produce *transcendent final goods* (a in fig-

ure 1). For example, by "going to Mass" and "receiving sacraments" (intermediate goods), I may produce the feeling of belonging to the "body of Christ." Transcendent final goods are the beliefs and feelings of owning (in the present or in the future) a "state of grace." Here, therefore, we find the highest Christian goals that, according to Christian doctrine, greatly surpass worldly goods in importance and extent (compare to Wilson 1982:27). Their exact description and interpretation varies from Christian tradition to Christian tradition. Without being exclusive, we can name as examples: justification, sanctification, spiritual growth, spiritual empowerment, charismata, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, a place in heaven, etc. I am well aware that theology has a tremendous amount to say concerning precisely how the means may or may not lead to these final transcendent goods. For a Lutheran or Reformed theologian, justification is always the work of God, never that of the believer. For a Calvinist, God may have decided in advance about sending individuals to hell or heaven (predestination). However, as Max Weber has shown in a magisterial way (1978[1920]:529), even in these theologies, a certain behavior or state of the individual is demanded, be it "good works," belief, or ethical behavior. A link between salvation means and ends persists even if the theological-theoretical link between them may be a complicated one. One of the most important points concerning transcendent final goods is that individuals may seek these goals in their own right (and not in order to get "other things"). Individuals may even concentrate all their efforts exclusively on these goals, disregarding or neglecting all other possible final goods.

Intermediate church goods, however, may be used to produce not only transcendent, but also various *immanent final goods* (b in figure 1). These goods are often very down-to-earth advantages in a wide variety of domains. Here is a list with what may be the most important immanent final church goods that may be produced with intermediate church goods.

(1) *Comfort in case of deprivation and help if one becomes needy.* For example, by going to Mass and talking with the priest, I may overcome grief concerning the loss of someone close and thus produce the good "comfort in case of deprivation." From the Middle Ages to modernity, "comfort in case of deprivation" or "care of the soul" was exclusively a matter for the Christian churches, and any "psychological problems" were treated by pastoral counseling (Holifield 1983).

(2) *A promise of security, health/healing, and success.* Intermediate church goods, such as being baptized, blessed, religiously married, receiving communion, or praying may be seen as important ways to create a feeling of security and a promise of future good health and success. Individuals may hope to be "magically protected" by God (Cook and Walter 2005) or recompensed by God with good health and success for their religious behavior. On the other hand, the church community does have very tangible means to help individuals in need, which may also further a feeling of security.

(3) *A feeling of peace and well-being.* Intermediate church goods may create an individual feeling of peace and well-being, for example, while praying during a religious service, or simply knowing that one is a "true Christian" in everyday life (Bellamy 2002).

(4) *Meaning and interpretation concerning the world in general.* By listening to a preacher, discussing in an Alpha Course, reading church material, or going to church education classes, individuals may produce the final good "meaning and interpretation" (Lynd and Lynd 1929:344). They may learn how to interpret both their current life problems and what is happening in society surrounding them in terms of Christian teaching (e.g. why their marriage broke up, why 9/11 had to happen, why their neighbors' children are such misfits).

(5) *A structure for the whole life-cycle.* Intermediate church goods can produce the final good "life-cycle structuring" with the help of services like baptisms, religious marriages, and funerals (Van Meerbeck 1995; Voyé 1991). These rituals allow individuals to "celebrate" and "sacralize" crucial moments in their life and thus to structure their life-cycle.

(6) *A positive social identity; a way of personal and family social integration and of producing social capital.* By being a member of a church and by attending its activities, one acquires a social role and both the self-respect and the respect by other members that goes with it. It may mean something socially if I am a Presbyterian of the so-and-so church, and the church may allow me and my family to find friends, to mingle with like-minded fellow Christians (bonding), and to make contact with individuals of higher or lower social status, whom I would not have met otherwise (bridging). I may also find partners for friendship, marriage, business, or political action (Weber 1973[1906], Putnam 2000).

(7) *An income and a career.* Christian churches are also places where individuals may make a living; they offer professional *careers* as a pastor, priest, deacon, religious sister etc. Historically, these careers have had different degrees of attractiveness in different periods, and the higher positions were primarily reserved for the nobility. It is safe to say, though, that until the mid-twentieth century, clerics in general enjoyed relatively high social prestige in Europe (McLeod 1998, Schorn-Schütte 2000).

One of the central points of this paper is that while transcendent final goods are normally only produced by means of Church goods (or other religious groups' goods), all of the immanent final goods mentioned may also be produced with intermediate goods produced by secular institutions. This opens up a field for competition between the religious and the secular.

TWO TYPES OF COMPETITION BETWEEN THE RELIGIOUS AND THE SECULAR

In this section, I show exactly which secular institutions compete with churches. While the competition appears in a wide variety of settings, I argue that we can distinguish two broad types of competition: functionally close and functionally distant ones.[14]

TYPE 1: FUNCTIONALLY CLOSE.

The first type of competition occurs when secular institutions offer intermediate goods with which individuals may create the same or similar immanent final goods as with church intermediate goods. In fact, concerning all the immanent final goods mentioned above, we find such competition. If individuals are considering producing these immanent final goods, we may expect them not simply to look at how much they like or dislike religious activities. They will rather *compare* utilities produced by the religious activity and by other, secular activities. Let us look at examples. In order to produce *comfort in case of deprivation* one does not have to see the pastor—one might also turn to psychoanalysis or psychotherapy, life coaching, and other secular methods (Bourdieu 1987).[15] *Security* may be produced in a secular way through welfare systems, including unemployment insurance, health insurance, disability insurance, and others.[16] In order to procure good *health,* an individual does not have to have recourse to prayer, but can turn to modern medicine. A feeling of *peace and well-being* may be produced not only through prayer, meditation, or religious service, but also through spending time with family and friends, listening to music, gardening, home-

making etc. (Bellamy *et al.* 2002). *Meaning and interpretation* concerning the world in general is provided not only by sermons and religious books, but also by modern media and science, through TV, newspapers, radio, books, and the internet. A *structure for the whole life-cycle* by way of life-cycle "rituals" is increasingly offered by secular entrepreneurs: party services, speakers, ritual entrepreneurs, burial firms, civil celebrants (Mayer 2007).[17] A *positive social identity* is due not only to congregation membership, but also to professional and marital status, membership in various secular groups and friendship networks and leisure activities. And—obviously—an income and career is possible not only in religious but in secular domains. Individuals thus very often have a choice between religious or secular intermediate goods *as means* in order to produce the same or similar immanent final goods. Individuals are thus tempted to substitute religious for secular intermediate goods or vice versa on the basis of a cost-benefit calculus. How do religious offers differ from secular ones?

On a very general level, we may note three points. First, goods produced by the churches *mix their specific benefits with a religious ideology*. The intermediate goods furnished by the churches cannot be detached from their context, and they are always integrated with a doctrine, in a system of religious symbols. This "plus" can be considered an advantage or a disadvantage. It is an advantage for a person who, for instance, appreciates the fact that a choir is not just about singing but fulfils at the same time a religious need. It is a disadvantage for a person who would like to sing, but not to plunge simultaneously into religious ideology. It is probably safe to say that church goods—due to their specific religious legitimacy—limit the number of possible "consumers," since people who might be interested in the good but who do not share the religious beliefs will abstain. On the other hand, in some cases, the "religious plus" is also appreciated for non-religious reasons. Thus, even non-religious parents sometimes rate "confessional schools" highly, because they believe that their children will learn better "values" in these schools than in public, secular schools.

Second, church goods are often *less professionalized and more community-oriented* than those of their secular competitors. In comparison, the secular goods are often more specific, rationalized, and efficient (Wilson 1982:44). The fact that the churches try to produce such a variety of goods means that they cannot marshal all their resources simply to attain a specific goal. In addition, the church employees (volunteer or professional) have often not undergone training as professionals—on the production of the specific good—unlike their secular competitors.[18] This orientation of low professionalization can be an advantage or a disadvantage from the point of view of different individuals. On the one hand, the prestige of church goods probably suffers in many cases, since alternative secular goods are considered "more scientific," "more efficient," or "more professional." On the other hand, and as we will see below, precisely a more "communal" type of good may sometimes seem especially attractive.

Thirdly, churches and church-related organizations often (but not always) can *produce their goods at lower cost than their secular competitors,* since they often use voluntary labor and/or are heavily subsidized by the church. Thus, entry to church-organized cultural activities, prices of church-related books, and fees for church camps and schools are often lower than are those of comparable secular competitors. However, the perceived benefit/cost balance might look very different for an areligious individual who never participates in church activities and only remains a church member in order to receive a decent burial. In

this case, a lifetime of church tax is a high price to pay and a secular burial—once available—may be much cheaper and just as satisfactory (see below for an example).

TYPE 2: FUNCTIONALLY DISTANT.

There is, however, a second type of competition. Here, individuals do not substitute intermediate goods in order to produce a given immanent final good. Rather, they substitute final goods among themselves. In other words, they may ask themselves if they would rather aim to produce a transcendent final good, say, spiritual growth, or an immanent final good, such as leisure or career satisfaction. Such substitutions are quite common in everyday life. On a Sunday morning, one may well choose to go for a drive in the automobile instead of going to religious service (as pastors noted with concern in the 1920s, Lynd and Lynd 1929).[19] A man may decide to become a priest and thus to forego the possibility of having a family. A family may decide to work on Sunday and thus maximize income instead of religious satisfaction.

Can we say anything general about when and under what conditions individuals would rather choose transcendent or immanent final goods? I offer two observations. First, individuals will choose transcendent final goods with a higher probability if immanent final goods are difficult to obtain. Remember that transcendent final goods can often be produced with relatively little money, technical resources, and in very difficult situations. They are built on a link with a transcendent and to a certain extent invisible reality, on trust and belief. They are built on promises and on assertions that cannot be immediately verified—or else the verification itself requires "belief." Even if an individual is very poor, ill, or has no family or income, it is still possible to produce spiritual growth, the belief in salvation or of finding a place in heaven. Transcendent final goods become, therefore, especially important once other immanent final goods are either unavailable or if their attainment is very insecure/risky (Weber 1978[1920], Norris and Inglehart 2004, Stark and Bainbridge 1985). However, if immanent final goods can be produced in a reliable and satisfactory way, individuals may well turn away from transcendent final goods that are built on unverifiable assertions and whose promises cannot be readily verified. If I already feel reasonably happy with my life (immanent final good), I may not be especially keen on being "saved" or "justified" in the first place.

Second, individuals will *ceteris paribus* be less likely to choose transcendent final goods in modern than in non-modern contexts. Since they cannot be verified, transcendent final goods are extremely vulnerable in modern societies. Any strong assertions of final transcendent goods (claiming of miracles, end of the world, healings, eternal life etc.) are easily criticized and/or ridiculed because they cannot be proved scientifically. They may be seen as the goals of cults, religious extremism, or fundamentalism; individuals who believe in such goods can be seen as brainwashed and/or manipulated; religious leaders who claim such goods openly may be seen as manipulators and frauds.[20]

HISTORICAL AND SOCIETAL PARAMETERS

Sociological explanations of the macro-micro-macro type typically need historical and societal parameters in order to be able to "work" (Esser 1998). We can distinguish three broad types of such historical and societal parameters influencing the extent of competition between religious and secular competition.

SUPPLY, PRICES, AND PRODUCTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR GOODS.

The first type concerns the supply, the price, and the productivity of religious and secular goods in a specific socio-historic situation. Individuals will choose a religious or secular alternative with a higher probability if—relative to the other alternative—it is more easily available, has a higher productivity, and a lower price. For example, in some societies individuals will not choose modern medical facilities in case of illness, since they are simply not available or are too costly. Once they become available or fall into the budgetary possibilities, individuals start to switch from religious to secular offers. To take another example: churches may suddenly find a new type of religious service and spirituality better adapted to the needs of many individuals. In time, more individuals may switch from secular uses for their time to religious ones, since the quality of the religious options has increased. Note that the change of these parameters often concerns innovation and technical or social progress. What Max Weber or Brian Wilson termed "rationalization" is in many instances a progress concerning the production of certain final goods through a new, better, more efficient use of intermediary goods. As Brian Wilson (1982) has argued, many times (but not always), secular institutions have had a clear advantage concerning their rationalizations in the modernization process of the last centuries. They have been successful in making the attainment of their means to produce final goods more reliably and efficiently.

REGULATION PARAMETERS.

A second type of parameter concerns state and societal regulation of the terms in which secular and religious offers may or may not compete. I define *regulation* in a very general way as societal and state influence or the governing of religion through both norms and incentives. With the help of incentives and by applying rules and norms, states and society influence the "rules of the game" for religious and secular players. Regulation can favor religious actions over secular ones. For example, religious membership may be required for full political membership in the community, the state may levy church taxes, religious participation may be mandatory for social respect, work on Sundays may be forbidden, the proclaiming of atheist beliefs may be sanctioned, or church activities may be subsidized. Conversely, regulation may favor secular over religious actions: church activities may be actively hindered, secular education and welfare inclusion may be mandatory, religious instruction may be banned from school curricula, religious symbols in schools may be forbidden, etc.

BACKGROUND PARAMETERS.

A third type may be called *background parameters*. These are neither direct attributes of the religious or secular offers, nor can they be subsumed under the heading *regulation*. Rather, they influence either the religious and secular supply or the individual demand of secular and religious products in theoretically meaningful ways. Examples are the level of technical and societal progress, the level of GDP per capita, the income/wealth distribution, the level of immigration, the salience of ethnic cleavages and size, and type of denominations. For example, a higher level of GDP per capita will allow individuals to acquire costly secular ways of solving their life problems and will lead *ceteris paribus* to an opt-

ing out of church goods. Alternatively, to take another example, an increase in the importance of ethnic cleavage will lead to an increase of demand for "social identity" and thus may increase the demand for church goods (for a whole list of such mechanisms see Stolz 2008b).

INDIVIDUALS CHOOSING BETWEEN THE RELIGIOUS AND THE SECULAR

How will individuals choose in the situations described above? As noted above, our theory assumes that individuals choose in a "rational" way.[21] On a very general level, the theory stipulates that individuals will—*ceteris paribus*—choose the combination of (religious and/or secular) intermediate goods that allow them to produce a set of (transcendent and/or immanent) final goods that maximize utility. When choosing action rationally, individuals can be influenced by prices, productivities, and income. If the price on an intermediate good rises, individuals will consume less; if the productivity or income rises, individuals will consume more. Changes in price, productivity, or income will therefore lead individuals to adapt rationally in both functionally close and functionally distant competition situations. For example, if a good drug increasing sexual potency appears (e.g. Viagra) on the market, magical means promising the same effect will be demanded less (functionally close). On the other hand, if a new factory is built in my neighborhood, offering me a job, I may find that by increasing production of financial satisfaction and decreasing production of religious satisfaction, I can increase my overall utility. This means that I will work more and use less time for, say, going to Mass (functionally distant).

One might object that the decisions supposed here are *impossible,* since the options are *too different to be compared.* Bruce (1993:351) writes that "... it is clear that ten-pin bowling is not an alternative to worshiping the Lord." He continues to say that time cannot function as a shadow price, "because people do not spend time *per se*, they spend time doing this or that, and their affective response to what they are doing changes the costs of the units thus "exhausted." The same argument is made, albeit from a very different perspective, from scholars in the rational choice tradition. They think that transcendent final goods are "irreplaceable," since no secular goods can promise, say, a life in heaven (Stark and Bainbridge 1985). In contrast, I would like to argue that we have ample empirical evidence from qualitative studies that individuals do indeed compare activities as different as ten-pin bowling (or going out for a drive, or work etc.) and religious activities that might lead to a life in heaven (Dixon 2007). In fact, individuals would probably not be able to live, if they were not able to compare and choose between vastly different alternatives for spending their time.

A second objection might be that such decisions (e.g. deciding to believe in either God or evolution, going to church or sleeping in, choosing either a religious youth group or a football club) are *empirically rare* and could therefore not account for many empirical phenomena. One might point out that many individuals are in the *habit* of choosing either religious or secular options. In my view, it is true that most of individuals' actions are routinized. However, this does not mean that decisions are not involved somewhere in the process (Goldthorpe 2000). In fact, from this theory's point of view, it is rational to routinize actions, once decisions are taken (Esser 1999, Stigler and Becker 1995[1977]). Once I have decided to sleep in on a Sunday morning instead of going to church, I do so routinely and do not

make a "conscious decision" of this behavior every Sunday. It then appears as if going to church is not really an option anymore (although it is). This also means that we have to allow for the possibility that changing opportunities in the religious/secular competition sometimes change actions not in an immediate, but a slow manner, often involving generational processes (Gill and Lundsgaarde 2004). Individuals who are in the habit of using church goods in case of illness may not immediately and completely "switch" to modern medicine, once these more powerful and rationalized options are available. However, they may try combinations and gradually shift their actions over the years. They will put less or no emphasis on transmitting their religious beliefs and practices concerning the treatment of illness to their children. Moreover, the children will choose secular options quite naturally. Such a process may be called "behavioral drift" (Voas 2008).

EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES AND LEADS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

EXPLAINING EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The theory presented above explains a wide variety of findings reported in the literature and provides an integrating framework for many insights in specific fields. I give eight examples that concern different types of goods and involve one or both types of competition.

PRACTICING CATHOLICS WHO STOP ATTENDING MASS IN AUSTRALIA.

Mass attendance in Australia has been continuously falling during the last decades (Bellamy *et al.* 2002). As Dixon *et al.* (2007) point out, it is not just individuals who have lacked a religious upbringing who fail to show up on Sunday morning. Instead, an increasing number of regular participants have stopped attending. While there are different causal factors at work, research clearly shows that two of the most important—and interrelated—factors are diminishing normative regulations and secular alternatives of spending one's time. On the one hand, Catholics "no longer feel that being a committed Catholic requires going to Mass every week" (Dixon 2007:5). On the other hand, and in the context of this breakdown of normative expectation, individuals increasingly feel that other ways of using their time are *more valuable.* In Australia, the most important secular alternatives to Mass on a Sunday morning concern family activities, leisure activities, and work. Dixon *et al.* (2007:51) comment that, "recent changes in Australian society and culture, such as changes to work practices and to Sunday sport and shopping, mean that people now have other commitments on weekends that compete with going to Mass." Our theory thus explains the phenomenon (in part) through competition of the "functionally distant type": Due to a change in normative regulation and the existence of new and powerful secular alternatives, secular goals are replacing spiritual ones in the pursuit of utility.

WAVES OF CHURCH DISAFFILIATION IN GERMANY.

Aggregated data concerning disaffiliation from the "Evangelische" and the Catholic Church in Germany since the 1960s shows that peaks can be found in the years 1970/71, 1973/74 and 1991. Interestingly, these are the years where special general taxes (1970/71: "Konjunkturzuschlag; 1973/74: "Stabilitätsabbgabe"; 1991 "Solidaritätszuschlag") were

levied or introduced (Birkelbach 1999:137). Quite clearly, due to these additional taxes, individuals faced a budget reduction. Many of them then decided that they would rather spend their money on secular matters than on church affiliation in order to produce utility.

INCREASING CIVIL BURIALS IN ALSACE, FRANCE.

In France (Alsace), the churches report that the numbers of church funerals have been decreasing since funeral entrepreneurs and the state cemetery have successfully been offering civil funerals. These may include accompanying the family and a period of meditation in a chapel room, but with no reference to any specific religion. All of this is offered at a "good price" (Grellier 2007).

DROP IN ORDINATIONS OF PRIESTS IN SPAIN.

From the 1960s on, the Catholic church in Spain has had to face great difficulties in recruiting priests: "... Spanish diocesan ordination rates dropped sharply over 19 years to about one-quarter of their strength, from a high of 2.4 percent active priests in the late 1960s to a low of only 0.6 percent by the mid-1980s" (Vilarino and Tizon 1998:30). The theory here proposed explains this by two simultaneous developments. On the one hand, Spain lost at this time its formerly ubiquitous "clerical ethos," leading to a loss of power and prestige of the clerical profession and to an increasing awareness of the "cost" of enforced celibacy by possible candidates for priesthood. On the other hand, better possibilities for social mobility *outside* the church became available to families that formerly were at the heart of priest recruitment (Vilarino and Tizon 1998:29). The combination of these factors created an increasingly unfavorable balance for clerical professions relative to secular professions. While the socio-historical parameters vary from country to country, largely similar decreases of ordinations can be seen in Western Europe, the USA, and Australia. Note that this explanation also accounts for the fact that the recruiting of priests continues to be successful in less industrialized areas, such as Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Here, clerical professions continue to enjoy relatively high social prestige and secular alternatives for social mobility are often lacking.[22]

LIBERALIZATION OF THE RELIGIOUS MARKET AND SECULARIZATION IN THE NETHERLANDS.

The Netherlands from 1950 to 1990 has seen a growing "religious market." Religious regulation has somewhat loosened, religious plurality has clearly increased, the churches have become more competitive, and individuals have broken free from "pillars," establishing themselves as individualized "consumers." Yet, religiosity did not increase—as rational choice theory would have predicted—but was faltering at a tremendous speed (Lechner 1996). Again, the explanation involves the competition between religious and secular institutions: During the early 20th century, Dutch churches had constructed "pillars" in which individuals were constrained to use churches in order to obtain a wide variety of immanent goods. However, with increasing state welfare, the pillar system broke down and individuals faced increasing choice between religious and secular options in order to solve these life problems. In consequence, the demand for religion declined. As Lechner aptly observes, "In the Netherlands, churches were not simply engaged in competition with each other; the religious economy itself was exposed to competitive pressure" (1996:262).

STRONG RELIGIOSITY IN THE USA.

Religiosity (measured as service attendance or belief) is—on average—higher in the US than in most European countries. While all European countries show a tremendous decrease of religiosity over the last decades (from whatever level they started out), religiosity in the US seems remarkably stable (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Presser and Chaves 2007). It seems quite clear that the US is an exception in that it is a highly industrialized, but continually religious country (Lipset 1991). In order to explain this exception, various historical factors would have to enter the picture, which would be beyond the scope of this paper. However, our theory can add one (in my view important) point to an overall explanation by showing that, in the US, religious congregations and denominations are in a better position with respect to their secular competitors than in virtually all comparable industrialized countries. In order to see this, we have to remember that the US differs from most other western countries in that minimal state policy is widely applied to free enterprise (Shafer 1991). While in European countries as well as in Canada the state provides welfare, education, media, transportation, medical provision, insurance etc, in the US it is much more private firms and enterprises that provide these goods. While individuals in European countries may feel in a certain way "secure" since they are embedded in a net of often-obligatory state provisions, US citizens have to make many personal choices and are individualistic consumers on markets for practically all the goods mentioned. This involves a high amount of freedom, but also risk and impersonality (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Paul 2005). It therefore seems that communities that integrate individuals and their families in a diffuse way and provide *many goods at the same time* are a very attractive product in a society such as the US. In fact, religious congregations in the US can provide social capital for the whole family, social identity, integration into the national community via the national ideology (Americanism), as well as education and values for one's children (Herberg 1960; Warner 1998). It seems that, while other social groups and institutions can provide some of these goods just as well or better, no other institutions can provide all of these goods simultaneously. In addition, the multi-functionality of congregations may precisely be very valuable in such an individualistic and market-oriented society as the US. Since individuals in the US have a high incentive to join and stay in religious groups, they have also a high motivation to value the transcendent final goods equally produced there.[23] Our theory would thus suggest that it is not so much the fact that churches compete among themselves that is important (as traditional rational choice of religion would have it), but that they are in a much better position vis-à-vis the secular competition—compared with other industrialized nations.

EFFECT OF REPEALING "BLUE LAWS" IN THE USA.

In various states of the US, the so-called "blue laws" were repealed. These laws frequently prohibited "labor" or "all manner of public selling" on Sundays, but often made exceptions for acts of charity (Gruber and Hungerman 2006:3). It was observed that the abandonment of these laws led to a significant drop in religious attendance in the respective states (Gruber and Hungerman 2006). Our theory explains this with a "type 2" competition: religious and secular activities and institutions compete for individual time allocation. As Gruber and Hungerman note, "The repeal of these laws in cities and states substantial-

ly increases the opportunity cost of religious attendance by offering alternatives for work, leisure, and consumption."

STRONG RELIGIOSITY IN AGRARIAN COUNTRIES.

The importance of religion, religious beliefs, and religious action are much higher in agrarian countries than in Europe (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Pew Global Attitudes Project 2007). Our theory explains this with the observation that in these countries we find a very low GDP and high risks of all kinds (medical, political, geological) for individuals. Individuals therefore have a high demand for various immanent final goods, such as compensation when deprived, security and hope, and interpretation of the world. Yet, in these countries, individuals often do not have secular means in order to fulfill their needs, either because these secular intermediate goods (welfare state, insurances, public education) do not exist or because they are unaffordable. Therefore, individuals will use religious institutions' intermediate goods in order to produce these immanent final goods. This has the effect of also making transcendent final goods more important in the minds of the individuals. Additionally, since the attainment of immanent final goods with church goods is inherently risky, individuals will find here an additional reason to find transcendent final goods important.

EXAMPLES COMPARED.

The examples show that the model can explain a wide variety of findings on various levels of generality reported in the literature. We can compare examples concerning the *type of competition* involved. We see that sometimes we have clear cases of type 1 competition (functionally close), as in the example of ordinations in Spain or in the case of religious and secular burials in France. Other times, we have clear cases of type 2 competition (functionally distant), as in the use of time of Catholics in Australia, the effect of additional taxes in Germany or the repealing of the blue laws in the USA. And many times, the two types are mixed, such as when we look at the secularization in the Netherlands, and the strong religiosity in the USA and agrarian states. Concerning the *causal structure,* the examples show an interesting variety. In all the examples, we find the *(non-) existence of secular institutions or the change of the offer by such institutions* as an important causal factor. Thus, we find that religious offers have to compete with the family, leisure, and work (ex. 1), civil burial organizations (ex. 2), secular careers (ex. 3), unspecified non-religious ways of spending one's money (ex. 4), a secularized welfare state (ex. 5), shopping on Sunday (ex. 6). Or we find that religious institutions have a good position due to the non-existence of secular institutions that offer a diffuse and integrating mix of various secular imminent goods (ex. 7) or because of the absence or unaffordability of a strong welfare state, insurances, public education, etc (ex. 8). At the same time, we find that in many examples a *change in regulation* is also involved. Thus, social control concerning Mass attendance weakens (ex. 1); the clerical ethos of Spain disintegrates (ex. 3); the pillar-system breaks up (ex. 5); "blue laws" are repealed (ex. 6). In two examples, *level or change in income* is important, namely a drop in income due to tax increases (ex. 4) and (in comparison to industrialized countries) a low income level in agrarian countries (ex. 8).

HOW TO RESEARCH RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR COMPETITION

The many examples given have shown that the present theoretical framework can be applied empirically. In order to use the framework for empirical research, one has to start identifying the church goods and the secular alternatives in the specific situation at hand, the immanent and transcendent final goods involved, the type of competition (functionally close or distant) as well as the important socio-historical conditions (e.g. changes in attributes of church goods and/or secular alternatives, regulation parameters, background parameters) that are thought to produce the aggregated outcome (explanandum). Furthermore, attention should be paid to possible validity problems. In other words, empirical studies have to show that other possible causal factors can be ruled out. A good example of this is in Gruber and Hungerman (2006), where the authors show that the repealing of the law was the important causal effect and not (also possible) a decrease in religiosity prior to the repealing of the law.

CONCLUSION

This article has tried to spell out the theoretical consequences of the insight that there may be competition between religious and secular institutions in a variety of arenas. I have shown that the three most important theories looking at the fate of religion in modernity—secularization theory, individualization theory, and market theory—have, important insights notwithstanding, failed to grasp this important point. *The central question* I have treated in this article has been as follows. To what extent and concerning what "goods" do Christian churches in Western Europe face competition by secular institutions? How does this competition influence individual actions and—through aggregation—social explananda? I have tried to answer this question by constructing a theory of religious and secular competition, built on an explanatory (rational-action based) framework and using the notion of "social production functions." I have argued that Christian churches at present can be understood as voluntary membership associations that produce intermediate church goods (affiliation, services, collective activities, public goods, and individual positions). Intermediate goods offered by churches provide individuals with the opportunity to produce final goods that may be transcendent (e.g. afterlife, life in Christ, gifts of the spirit, etc.) or immanent (e.g. comfort in case of deprivation, meaning and interpretation, social integration, life-cycle structuring etc.). While churches and other religious institutions are without competition when it comes to producing transcendent final goods, they have to face very tough competition concerning immanent final goods. A host of secular institutions (the family, work, the education and leisure sector, psychotherapy, medicine, insurances, the welfare state, etc.) all produce intermediate goods that allow individuals to produce immanent final goods such as compensation when deprived, security, hope for the future, values and guidance, interpretation of the world, and others. Two types of competition can be identified. A first type concerns "functionally close" competition between religious and secular means in order to produce a given immanent final good, such as "compensation when deprived." Individuals may have to choose, say, between going to a pastor or a psychotherapist if they feel psychologically challenged. A second, "functionally distant" type involves a choice between transcendent or immanent final goods. For example, individuals may have to choose

if they would rather strive for spiritual growth or a career. The theory assumes that individuals, based on beliefs and preferences, choose their actions in a rational way and that many social outcomes are thus to be explained as following from aggregations of individual adaptations to given states of competition between the religious and the secular. The relative attractiveness of religious and secular offers is in turn seen to depend on two types of socio-historical parameters: regulation by the state and society and further background parameters, such as level of GDP, ethnic cleavages, immigration, and others. I have argued that this theoretical framework—when properly specified with the help of initial socio-historic conditions—can account for a wide variety of empirical findings, such as the waning of Mass attendance in Australia, waves of disaffiliation in Germany, the strong religiosity in the USA and agrarian countries, and others. We thus get a feeling that a "silent battle" between secular and religious options is taking place, a relatively silent competition that mainly involves individual entries and exits from and into the religious and secular domain and that produces much of what currently puzzles sociologists of religion.

NOTES

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[1]While I criticize these three approaches, I have to acknowledge that many of the authors mentioned are among my central theoretical influences (e.g. Brian Wilson, Steve Bruce, Rodney Stark, Laurence R. Iannaccone, Detlef Pollack, David Voas).

[2]In fact, the secularization paradigm involves a whole family of theories and propositions well presented by Bruce (2002). I cannot do justice to all of them but concentrate on what might be the currently most influential version. It must be noted that newer versions of the secularization theory as presented, for example, by David Voas or Steve Bruce go in the direction of creating a micro-foundation of secularization theory. But they do not as yet seem to have produced a theory of secular and religious competition.

[3]Among the most important authors of individualization theories are Thomas Luckmann and Grace Davie. To focus my discussion, I concentrate on the seminal text by Luckmann (1967).

[4]For an interesting alternative version of the market theory of religion, see Blasi (1997). In my view, many of Blasi's insights might be reconstructed with the theory of intermediate and final goods.

[5]In fact, this article may be seen as an application and extension of the "religious and secular commodities approach" suggested by Iannaccone (1997).

[6]Macro-Micro-Macro explanations are causal explanations. They give causal "stories" (or "mechanisms") that tell us how initial conditions are transformed into the phenomenon to be explained. For sociological purposes, it is useful to couch causal assertions not in determinist, but probabilistic terms (Hedström 2005). Cause A does not always lead to effect B, but does so only with a certain probability. Philosophers of science debate if we should assume a probabilistic reality or if reality is deterministic and the unexplained variance is due to (equally deterministic) factors that have not been included in the model. But for practical purposes we do not have to decide this difficult question (Kelle 2007, Goldthorpe 2000). Note that our position differs strongly from approaches that negate the possibility of causal explanations in the social sciences on grounds that "social systems" are too "complex" or "self-referential" to be explained causally and that causality is just an "observation scheme" by an "observing system" (Luhmann 1991).

[7]For lack of space, I do not go into the theoretical details of different types of social "aggregation" (or "transformation"). Suffice it to say that aggregation is the process by which individual actions are somehow transformed into a social "outcome" (the explanandum). The rules of transformation may be very simple statistical aggregation, such as summation, leading to different percentages as the social outcomes. They may, however, also be complex, such as in threshold models, game theoretical models, process models etc. Good general discussions

can be found in Coleman (1986) and Esser (2000, Bd.2, p. 1-30). In the examples from the literature given at the end of this paper, most aggregations are simple summations of individual actions. Let me add that the social phenomenon, which is the outcome of a macro-micro-macro-explanation, can itself be seen as the starting point of a new macro-micro-macro element. Increasingly complex models can thus be built (Esser 2000, Bd.1).

[8]I define religiosity as individual preferences, emotions, beliefs, and actions that refer to an existing (or self-made) religion.

[9]This means that our definition puts tourism, sports, pop music and sexuality in general into the "non-religious" realm. This does not exclude the possibility of adding religious elements to them and thus producing, say "Christian pop music."

[10]Sociologists of religion have only recently begun to map with survey methodology what those "products" created by religious congregations really are (Chaves 2004).

[11]I present the version by Esser (1999:75) in a slightly simplified version.

[12]For this example, I follow Lindenberg (1989) who posits the axiom of a human need of recognition.

[13]A sixth type, which I do not treat here, is religious merchandise. See Stolz (2006)

[14]A third type of competition would be inter-religious competition, that is, between religious groups. This type of competition, which I do not analyze for lack of space, is theoretically compatible with, and often causally related to, the competition here described.

[15]Abbott (1988:293) convincingly shows how, in the United States, the clerics have lost the battle for the monopoly of treating "souls" to the professional psychotherapists.

[16]Participation in these welfare and insurance schemes is often compulsory. This may lead to a "crowding out" of churches. Altermatt (2001) shows for the case of Switzerland how Catholic welfare institutions established mostly in the nineteenth century faltered because the state took over their functions in the twentieth century by creating old age and widow insurance (1947), disability insurance (1960), and unemployment insurance (1982).

[17]Mayer (2007) describes private entrepreneurs who offer "custom-made" rituals, religious or secular. In Australia, since the 1960s, official civil celebrants exist who are licensed to perform secular marriages, "namings," funerals, and other rites of passage. In 2000, such civil celebrants offering their services in a market-like fashion conducted more than fifty percent of marriages. I thank Gary Bouma for pointing out this example to me.

[18]It may well be—for a variety of reasons—that in some cases, religious intermediate goods are produced in a more professionalized way than secular ones. This is, of course, a matter of empirical investigation.

[19]Historically, the idea that individuals have at their disposal "time for work" and "free time for leisure" stems from the late nineteenth century and is linked to the Industrial Revolution. This new distinction has the effect that religion is increasingly relegated to the private, leisure time sphere and has to compete with various other forms of "leisure activities" (Luhmann 1982:239). When leisure opportunities began to gain importance at the end of the nineteenth century, the possible competition between religion and leisure was very clearly seen.

[20]Religious groups who wish to maintain strong transcendent final goods must go to great lengths to preserve them. They must build "parallel worlds" for their members where the beliefs and practices are not continually challenged; they must sanction the belief in the strong versions of their beliefs, and they may present mild versions of their beliefs to the outside and use strong versions inside the group. Religious groups that do not wish to become "traditionalist," "fundamentalist," or "conservative," often transform their transcendent final goods by psychologizing or ethicizing them (Bruce 2002) or they concentrate on the production not of transcendent, but of immanent final goods. Interestingly, the latter choice increases the extent to which they find themselves in competition with secular institutions, for on the field of psychology, ethics, and immanent final goods (security, compensation etc.) all the secular institutions named above produce goods in their turn.

[21]In principle, I would extend rationality assumptions also to beliefs. I do not have space to go into this here, though. See for good discussions Boudon (1998), Goldthorpe (1998).

[22]Data on this can be found at: http://www.clerus.org/ (downloaded on 11.04.2008).

[23]The minimal state policy also allows religious groups to created distinct cultural "subworlds" that help their members to protect their beliefs and preferences from competing secular influences (Bruce 2002).

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