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RELIGIOUS PRAXIS—DE-INSTITUTIONALIZED. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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The word 'deinstitutionalized religion' does not produce a high number of references in literature data bases; it does not seem to be frequently used in scientific research on religion. I have not explicitly used it as analytic category before in my research and writing. But there are quite a number of other terms by which colleagues and myself have addressed the phenomena under consideration: 'un-churched religion' (Perry, Davis, Doyle, & Dyble 1980; Fuller 2002), 'vagabond religion', I have coined the metaphoric term 'off-road-religion' (Streib 1999); with a somewhat heavier interpretative load, the phenomena are also addressed by the term 'invisible religion' (Luckmann 1967); also, terms such as 'lived religion' (Ammerman 1997; Grözinger & Lott 1997; Hall 1997; Heimbrock 1998; Orsi 1997) or 'everyday religion' (Bukow 1984; Streib 1998a) are considered to include forms of religiosity which have no obvious roots in established religions. And finally, with the pretension to gain inclusiveness and accuracy, the term 'spirituality' has experienced some popularity, especially among psychologist (Emmons 1999; 2000; Pargament & Mahoney 2002; Piedmont 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott 1999). This brief semantic problem description indicates that there is some need for clarification. I will do this by testing the term 'deinstitutionalization'. I want to approach this task by...

1. looking at some statistical evidence for deinstitutionalization of religion; and
2. reflecting on the significance of 'deinstitutionalization' as concept for understanding the phenomena, but interpreting this term with a typology of religious organizations and with help of a conceptualization of 'deconversion' in order to arrive at a more conclusive understanding.
3. Then, attention is focussing on the question what kind of religion is left after the deinstitutionalizing processes and how we best describe 'de-institutionalized religion'.
4. Finally I ask how we should proceed further in investigating deinstitutionalized religion.

Thus I seriously consider 'deinstitutionalized religion' as candidate for naming the phenomena under consideration.

Statistical Evidence for Changes in the Religious Landscape with Special Attention to Deinstitutionalization

Deinstitutionalization describes a change, a transformation. Modernization has been the most prominent paradigm to interpret the changes which have influenced the religious domain. As one of the major effects of the modernization processes, it has been argued—and has become almost consensus among sociologists of religion—that religion has undergone a very fundamental transformation: from religion as fate to religions as choice. And people increasingly appear not only to join the religious organization of their choice, but also leave.

The Drift from Religious Institutions Worldwide

We do not have good enough data which is comprehensive and detailed enough to document the deinstitutionalization of religion in every detail. We are far from being able to draw a map of religious institutions, organizations and milieus and keeping track of religious migrations. But we have at least some data. In Table 1 and Table 2, I present results from the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP 1991; ISSP 1998) which indicate the drift from organized religion cross-culturally. The percentage of respondents who have answered the questions "In which religion have you been raised?" and "What is your current religion?" with "None" differ greatly from country to country.

The enormous differences in Great Britain and the Netherlands may be due to a much more open wording of the question ("Do you consider yourself to belong to a particular religious group or church?"), but the differences also display a different religious climate. To escape the criticism of comparing inconsistent data, however, I reduce my selection to countries in which the questions were asked with more consistency. The difference between the two answers may lead us the way to quantify the numbers of leave-takers. We have calculated the subjects who responded "None" to the question for current religious affiliation, but say they were raised in a specific religion. The result is the life-span disaffiliation rate.

Table 1. Raised without religion/Today without religious affiliation

	Raised without religion (1991)	Today without religious affiliation (1991)	Raised without religion (1998)	Today without religious affiliation (1998)
U.S.A.	3,5%	6,7%	5,2%	13,8%
New Zealand	11,7%	30,2%	15,8%	29,1%
Great Britain	5,6%	32,8%	10,3%	45,8%
Ireland	0,0%	1,7%	0,1%	5,6%
Italy	0,4%	6,1%	1,5%	7,6%
Austria	2,7%	10,1%	3,5%	11,8%
Netherlands	22,0%	55,4%	23,7%	58,1%
Germany-West	5,5%	10,6%	7,4%	15,3%
Germany-East	41,9%	64,3%	52,7%	68,7%
Russia	88,5%	68,2%	85,1%	35,3%

Table 2. Life-span disaffiliation rates and secular continuity rates in cross-cultural comparison

	Today without religions affiliation, but raised in a religion (life-span disaffiliation rate) 1991	Today without religious affiliation and raised without religion 1991	Today without religions affiliation, but raised in a religion (life-span disaffiliation rate) 1998	Today without religious affiliation and raised without religion 1998
U.S.A.	5,4%	1,3%	10,9%	2,9%
Italy	5,8%	0,3%	6,9%	0,7%
Austria	8,7%	1,4%	10,1%	1,7%
Germany-W.	7,8%	2,8%	10,5%	4,8%
Germany-East	24,6%	39,7%	18,3%	50,4%

While we see a somewhat lower rate in Italy, we have about 10% of disaffiliates in the U.S.A., Austria and West-Germany. We can take these figures as indication for a deinstitutionalization process in the religious field.

The results for the East-Germany are exceptional; but they are less surprising, when we take into account that they include all subjects who have left the church under the former East-German regime—and also interesting: the disaffiliation rate has dropped within two years,

perhaps due to East-West migration, but perhaps also due to other changes in the religious landscape. But taken together, the very large number of East-Germans who are alienated from organized religion, whether they grew up in secular milieus or disaffiliated themselves from the churches, is indeed troublesome in respect to the future of religion in East-Germany.

Growth of Secular Milieus—Observations in Germany East and West

The exit rates from the two main religious institutions in Germany, the Protestant and the Roman-Catholic Churches, have risen from 1945 to the turn of the century up to an average of about 0,7% or 0,8%. Thus every year adds to the number of people without religious affiliation. Even though we do not know exactly where church-leavers are going, we see no equivalent growth of other churches or religious organizations in Germany. It is especially the analysis and conclusion of Pollack (1996; Pollack & Pickel 2003; cf. also Pollack & Hartmann 1998; Pollack & Pickel 1999) that new religious groups are by far too small in number and not growing fast enough as to account for this disaffiliation process from the main-line churches in Germany.

For a more detailed account on Germany, we can refer to the data from the *Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften* (ALLBUS 1980–2000; ALLBUS 2002) on current and former religious affiliation and a-religious upbringing to visualize the continuously growing deinstitutionalization of religion in two decades (see Table 3). From the perspective of church and theology, the problem of course is not only the growing disaffiliation rates in the West, but also the high number of secular families, especially in East Germany, from which we hardly can expect to nurture institutionalized religion.

Table 3. Drift from the churches in Germany East and West

	<i>Have you been previously a member of a religious organization?</i>						
	1982-W	1992-W	1992-E	2000-W	2000-E	2002-W	2002-E
Previously member: Yes	6,6%	9,3%	33,1%	9,3%	24,1%	10,6%	21,4%
Previously member: No	1,1%	3,1%	33,3%	3,5%	46,9%	4,5%	41,5%
Presently member	92,3%	87,6%	33,6%	87,2%	29,0%	84,9%	37,1%

Self-assessment of being religious on a 10 point Likert-Scale obviously confirms the extraordinary difference between East and West Germany. But when we pay attention to the tendencies over two decades, we can see relative stability in West Germany—with a slight upward movement between 2000 and 2002; and we see an even smaller gain in East Germany. This may raise doubts whether indeed we have a progressing secularization process in Germany. We get a different picture if we ask people for their self-assessment of being religious, instead of asking for their institutional affiliation.

Leave-taking from the Churches in U.S.A.

Concluding this portrait of changes in the religious landscape, I would like to move briefly to the situation in the U.S.A. to highlight another aspect of deinstitutionalization of religion. What insights can we gain from research on religion there? Religious switching is probably most popular in the U.S.A. As the research shows (Hadaway & Marler 1993; Loveland 2003; Sherkat 2001; Sherkat & Wilson 1995), there are many different reasons for switching behavior; but research documents a total of 37,5% U.S. Americans who say in 1988 that they have had a different religion before their current affiliation. A question has been included in the *General Social Survey* (GSS 1972–2002) in 1988 (but unfortunately has not been repeated in the following years) which may shed some light on repeated deconversion. Out of 37,5% who say that they have had another religious affiliation before, 23,8% speak of *one* previous religion, but 9,1% report *two* and 2,2% even *three* previous religious affiliations. This not only reflects the affluent religious market in the U.S.A., but also the individual inclination to make a new choice and commitment.

Where did this freedom of choice lead? How did it change the religious landscape? The extent to which it did promote the deinstitutionalization of religion, can be seen from the growth and decline of churches over the decades. If we follow the data collected by the *Hartford Institute for Religion Research* (Dudley & Roozen 2001), moderate Protestantism has declined in the last century from 30% to 7%; Liberal Protestant churches have a similar decline; and also the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The growth is mainly on the part of Evangelical churches and on non-Christian religious communities. We may take this as indication of the deinstitutionalization of religion within the landscape of religious organizations in the U.S.A. Thus it may be

the case that the U.S.A. has a clear process of deinstitutionalization of religion—which in this case means the decline of institutionalized religion, but at the same time an enormous growth of churches and religious organizations which do not meet and do not desire the status of an institution.

To sum up this first part: What I have presented so far is some selected statistical evidence for, and preliminary attempts to quantify, the disaffiliation processes in selected countries. They speak—this is my interpretation—to the question of deinstitutionalization of religion on a cross-cultural scale, indicate the disaffiliation rates, but also the direction in which this processes may be going. Research on religion in cross-cultural comparison is not strong: Even though some authors, e.g. Greeley (1989; 2003), Zulehner and Denz (1993) or Höllinger (1996), analyze data from both sides of the Atlantic ocean and compare Europe and the U.S.A., they use mostly the same survey results—and these results lack in consistency and in precision and depth by which religion in the various countries has been investigated. Thus they are insufficient for a solid and detailed portrait, e.g. for mapping religious migration. They also have blind spots, because deinstitutionalization may involve more than affiliation with, or disaffiliation from, a religious organization in terms of membership. This may become more obvious when we now ask how we could conceptualize deinstitutionalization of religion.

*Deinstitutionalization as Concept for Interpreting the
Changes in Contemporary Religion*

The understanding of 'deinstitutionalization' rests on the understanding of 'institution'. But what is an institution? While we do not have a precise and consensual definition (cf. Berger & Heintel 2001), certain features are expected from an institution: societal stability, social obligation, authority, legitimacy. An institution, in a process perspective, integrates the individual and his or her biography into a societal system of values and rules. From a conflict perspective, an institution provides answers and obligatory solutions to irresolvable conflicts and contingencies (Schüleïn 1987). Applied to the social reality of religion and combining these features, I understand 'religious institution' as a highly stable, obligatory, authoritative and legitimate religious organization which integrates the individual biography in a system of beliefs, values and rules which are answers to specific religion-generating conflicts and contingencies.

Against the background that institutions own self-referential and unquestioned authority, sociologists have affirmed the decay of the power of institutions: with the "invention of the political" (Beck 1993a), the "super-ego of the institutions resolves itself into decision" (Beck 1993b, 26). For the individual biography, this means, on the one hand, that it is detached from prescribed fixations, and open, dependent on decision-making, a task of the individual (Beck 1992, 216); on the other hand, the individual is at risk, due especially to the ambivalent influence of the media, of becoming the "plaything of fashions, circumstances, trends and markets" (1992, 211). Going one step further, Kohli (1988) even claims that we have come into the situation that individuality, or the search for individuality, has taken the place of the institutions; norm-biography has been replaced by individuality; according to Kohli, there is a tendency toward the deinstitutionalization of biography, a "coercion to subjective conduction of one's life" (44). Somewhat more cautiously and with reference to her empirical research, Wohlrab-Sahr (1992; 1993) reminds us that the more or less hidden influence of an institutionalization of biography has not come to an end—which may become visible also in the withdrawal of individuals from taking a teleological perspective at all. But these authors give us strong notions of the deinstitutionalization processes.

Deinstitutionalization—A Concept Arrives in the Sociology of Religion

Besides its use in other fields,¹ deinstitutionalization has become also a term used by sociologists of religion—at least in the discussion in Germany (Ebertz 1993; Tyrell 1993; Feige 1994; Pollack et al. 2003). While the term itself is not used very frequently, the discussion about the declining influence of religious institutions has become lively in the last decades. Berger's (1967) *Sacred Canopy* and Luckmann's (1963) *Das Problem der Religion in der modernen Gesellschaft*—which later became *The Invisible Religion* (1967)—have influenced the discussion. Both however are among many critics of the secularization hypothesis in the sense of the simple expectation that religion will decline and eventually evaporate

¹ 'Deinstitutionalization' of course—and I mention this in passing, but with an ironic side-glance to its implication for religious institutions—has become a frequently used term in a specific debate: the discussion about the de-hospitalization of the mentally ill (cf. e.g. Forster 2000; Fakhoury & Priebe 2002; Krieg 2003). In this field, 'deinstitutionalization' has the connotation of hope that de-institutionalized people may find a better home in communities and neighborhoods and are better cared for by community service than inside their institutions—an assumption that is discussed controversially.

together with the declining plausibility and legitimacy of religious institutions. It is Luckmann's thesis that

despite the fact that people in modern societies may differ in their lifestyle from other cultures, the fundamental religious constitution of their life has not been lost. . . . The fundamental social and cultural transformations did not change anything at the constitutive religious nature of human life.²

But religion has changed with the loss of the monopoly of the churches to present, communicate and mediate the 'sacred universa' and with the rise of competition in the religious market.

Berger (1979) claims that no one in our age can escape the "heretical imperative." With the Greek verb '*hairain*', Berger does not want to invoke the judgmental or even condemnatory connotation which this word has assumed in part of church history, but wants to specify, alluding to the original Greek meaning, that everyone has the obligation to make a choice. Imperative heresy may perhaps sound rather radical, but it resembles the analysis of Beck and Kohli about the deinstitutionalization of biography and the "coercion to subjective conduction of one's life."

One could assume that, after these processes of deinstitutionalization of religion, there is no room for religious institutions at all and that individual religion can only exist deinstitutionalized. This would be an overstatement, as we see in Berger's work itself. His analysis, while certainly reckoning with the end of monopolized institutionalized religion, suggests that religion will differentiate itself—and thus reflect the differentiation process in society. Instead of one form of religion, Berger expects three options: (1) the option of an orthodox deduction which is the escape into neo-orthodoxy or neo-traditionalism; (2) a modernizing reduction which Berger sees in the contemporary theological 'flirt' with modernity and bargaining away any mythology; and (3) the option of experiential induction which takes human experience as the starting point for religion as Berger sees this represented in liberal theological thought. These three options are not only the sociologist's contribution to the theological debate thirty years ago, it is also the attempt to specify

² "So sehr sich aber die Menschen in den modernen Gesellschaften in der Lebensart von anderen Kulturen unterscheiden mögen, die grundlegend religiöse Verfassung ihres Lebens ist nicht verloren gegangen. . . . Die grundlegenden sozialen und kulturellen Wandlungen änderten nichts an der konstitutiv religiösen Natur des menschlichen Lebens." (Luckmann 1991: 164)

the coordinates of a map of organized religion—which Berger seems to understand as being transformed by deinstitutionalization. This portrait by Berger is helpful, but needs precision and clarification. I will suggest this by drawing attention to a typology of religious organizations which has recently been introduced by Bromley.

First Interpretation and Differentiation: Bromley's Typology

Bromley (1998) has proposed a typology of religious organizations which distinguishes between three types of religious organizations according to their tension to the societal environment.³ Bromley's basic category is legitimacy. Thus he distinguishes religious organizations according to the degree of legitimacy which they attain in relation to society. Also Bromley identifies the roles of people who have left a religious organization as a function of the social location of the religious organization.

Table 4. Bromley's typology of religious organizations and exit role

<i>Type of religious organization</i>	<i>Type of exit role</i>
<p><i>Allegiant organizations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – high legitimacy; – interest coincidence with surrounding organizations 	<p><i>Defector</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – presents no serious challenge to the organization; – negotiates exit with authorities; – has a sense of personal failure; – is likely to reaffirm the organization's values and goals
<p><i>Contestant organizations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – medium legitimacy – competitive tension with surrounding 	<p><i>Whistleblower</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – forms an alliance with external regulatory unit – offers personal testimony about practices in the organization which is then used against it
<p><i>Subversive organizations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – low legitimacy; – high tension with society 	<p><i>Apostate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – presents serious challenge to the organization, e.g. through captivity narratives; and/or – alliance with oppositional coalition

³ In the analysis of new religious movements, Bainbridge (1997) distinguishes between 'high-tension' and 'low-tension' groups.

What can we draw from Bromley's typology? His typology clearly assumes that institutionalized religion does not exist any more in its pure and monopolistic form, but has fallen apart into a variety of organizations. Bromley cautiously speaks about religious *organizations*, rather than of religious *institutions*. This is obvious and even necessary in talking about the subversive, new religious type of religious groups; because of their regional and quantitative marginality, they cannot be addressed by the term 'institution'. This is plausible also for the contestant type of religious groups, since, by definition, they do not earn nor aspire the high degree of legitimacy and societal validity. It is more difficult with Bromley's allegiant type of organizations: Are there religious organizations in the U.S.A. which are institutions in the full sense? If we use the term 'institution' here, then with the qualification, that they have only regional authority.

From this perspective, we also get a grasp on the differences between the U.S.A. and Europe. Perhaps we do not find institutionalized religion in the proper sense in the U.S.A. at all, but at most a number of institutions with regional authority. So Bromley may be correct that, especially when focusing on the U.S.A., the most we have is a variety of allegiant religious organizations with a very high degree of legitimacy. This is still different for Europe where, in many countries, we have only one or two religious institutions—which, of course, had to adapt to the societies. 'Deinstitutionalization of religion' can however be specified in light of Bromley's types. His typology suggests that we have to take into account a variety of organizational forms as effect of the deinstitutionalization process.

Second Interpretation and Differentiation: Deconversion

A second differentiation needs to be introduced: Berger's three options appear rather inconsiderate of the more strongly self-willed processes such as "leave-me-alone"-disaffiliation on the one end, and the spiritual patchworkers on the other end of the religious spectrum, which I have called the 'accumulative heretics' (Streib 1998b; 1999; 2000; 2002). The same is true for Bromley's types. Because he focuses on institutional affiliation and disaffiliation, exit, for him, means leave-taking; and in his description of exit roles, Bromley does not pay attention to, but rather ignores, the religious beliefs or practices of the leave-taker.⁴ Also,

⁴ For defectors, as in the case of nuns and priests who have left their communities, he explicitly acknowledges that these defectors remained devout Catholics. Whistle-

because he has in mind a specific image of religious 'organization' with rather clear boundaries, leadership structure, and membership status, Bromley does not account for religious groups, milieus and scenes in which these characteristics are less strongly developed or even absent. Thus, similarly to the necessary changes in sociology to include the analysis of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of *biography*, I see the need for further differentiation which pays special attention to the individual's faith and belief, ritual practice and value system—to religious praxis. This is the special focus of our *International Study of Deconversion* project.⁵ Thus, I suggest to interpret the concept of deinstitutionalization with the concept of *deconversion*.

In order to elaborate a working definition of 'deconversion', we (Streib & Keller 2004) suggest to take Barbour's (1994) criteria for deconversion⁶ as a start, reflect and improve them in light of Glock's (1962; 1966) five dimensions and arrive at the following list of criteria. Deconversion consists in:

1. Loss of specific religious experiences (Experiential Dimension); this means the loss of finding meaning and purpose in life; the loss of the experience of God; of trust and of fear;
2. Intellectual doubt, denial or disagreement with specific beliefs (Ideological Dimension); thus heresy (sensu Berger) is an element of deconversion;
3. Moral criticism (Ritualistic Dimension) which means a rejection of specific prescriptions and/or the application of a new level of moral judgment;
4. Emotional suffering (Consequential Dimension); this can consist in a loss of embeddedness, of social support or of a sense of stability and safety;
5. Disaffiliation from the community which can consist in a retreat from participation in meetings or from observance of religious practices; finally, the termination of membership which eventually follows.

blowers are regarded to have, at least at first, no intention of exiting the organization. In the strict sense, Bromley does not speak about deconverts, his types are not types of deconversion.

⁵ See our web site at <http://wwwhomes.uni-bielefeld.de/religionsforschung> for results and publications.

⁶ Barbour (1994, 2) distinguishes four characteristics: (1) Intellectual Doubt or Denial in regard to the truth of a system of beliefs, (2) Moral Criticism: rejection of the entire way of life of a religious group, (3) Emotional Suffering: grief, guilt, loneliness, despair, and (4) Disaffiliation from the community.

These characteristics of deconversion can be used to structure empirical research and as criteria of what characterizes biographical accounts as deconversion stories. Certainly, these criteria have been developed for use in the analysis of deconversion trajectories from any type of religious groups or organization. But they hold true also for withdrawals from religious *institutions*. Thus, these criteria of deconversion can be used to highlight and determine the deinstitutionalization of religious *biography*.

*Empirical Research on Deconversion and Deinstitutionalization
Processes of Religion*

For empirical investigation of deinstitutionalization of religion, it is inspiring to evaluate what has been completed so far in the research on deconversion. Of course, deinstitutionalization and deconversion are not simply identical, but firstly, as I have tried to make the case above, the two have a solid area of intersection, and secondly, the qualitatively oriented research designs may inspire and improve research on deinstitutionalization. Therefore, I briefly refer to selected studies of deconversion.

The empirical study of deconversion has emerged as part of the scientific study of new religious movements. The 1980s have been a relatively productive decade, as the studies of Skonovd (1981), Levine (1984), Jacobs (1987; 1989), and Wright (1987) demonstrate. These studies have the merit of bringing to light some of the dynamics of deconversion from new religions which have been viewed with special concern in public discussion, in the courts, and in politics of the time. The results of these research projects are not perfect.⁷ Some of their deficits are overcome in more recent research.

Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) have studied religious socialization of more than 4,000 college students and have identified, in this large sample, 24 "amazing believers", subjects who come from non- or anti-religious backgrounds and find faith, and 46 "amazing apostates" who come from religious backgrounds and "convert" to atheism or

⁷ We need, in respect to present-day desiderata for research in deconversion, to point to some short-comings: Deconversion is studied as a turning point phenomenon involving crisis and conflict; efforts to conceptualize deconversion or linking this concept to the discussion on conversion are rather scarce. We do not see an integrative effort to situate deconversion in theories of faith or religious development. Deconversion is predominantly linked to adolescence and young adulthood, while data on the second half of life are restricted to rare cases.

agnosticism. According to Hunsberger (2000), the process of becoming an amazing apostate is "strongly intellectual and rational, and seems to result from a slow, careful search for meaning and purpose", resulting in "a dramatic transformation of self in 'becoming one's own person'" (245f). The picture that Hunsberger draws is one of hard-won freedom, independence and personal identity and self-confidence—and of tolerance, since amazing apostates, in sharp contrast to the amazing believers, refrain from proselytizing. The "amazing apostates" have deconverted in a rather gradual process (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997, 232). The process of deconversion can be characterized here as individuating-reflective gain over a period of socialization in and before the college years.

Richter and Francis (1998) have explored the reasons for leaving mainline churches in Great Britain. They started by interviewing 27 church leavers who were mainly recruited by clergy, and followed with a questionnaire survey with more than 400 church leavers located through an extensive telephone screening. Richter and Francis found that many church leavers claim to believe in and experience God without belonging to a church, "their spiritual quest persists" (p. 38). Richter's and Francis' discussion of influences leading to the decision to leave church is structured partially along familiar lines: social change, change of values, critical life events, childhood socialization. But they also attempt to account for changes in faith development. The authors address the question of fit between stage of faith of church goers and the 'modal level' of their churches and, consequently, of their possible common growth and mutual advancement.

Jamieson (1998; 2002) is the first to study deconversion predominantly in association with faith development. His study includes interviews with 98 church leavers (and 54 interviews with church leaders) of evangelical Pentecostal and charismatic churches in New Zealand. Jamieson has outlined a typology of leavers from Episcopalian Pentecostal churches which he aligns to Fowler's model of faith development. These people, while leaving the same type of religious group which Jamieson identifies as being on Fowler's Stage Three of Synthetic-Conventional Faith, move in different directions, which also differ in terms of stages of faith. This illustrates the need to look at the interactions of social context and individual motives and biographical trajectories involved in leaving religious groups. These questions also concern mainline traditions.

The Enquete Commission of the 13th German Parliament on "So-called sects and psycho-groups" has invited biographical research on

members and ex-members of Christian-fundamentalist groups.⁸ Of the 22 interviews conducted, 12 were selected for analysis according to the rule of maximal contrast. In our analysis, we did not find (what some in the Enquete Commission had expected us to find) a typical 'sect biography', neither of converts, nor of deconverts. What we found was a variety of biographical trajectories. Important in regard to our theme of deconversion is our observation that the attraction toward fundamentalist affiliation is due to 'themata' which derive from earlier experiences and belong to a biographically older layer of the person. Not only the affinity towards the group, and thus the stability of membership, appears to be the effect of a 'fit' or resonance between the themata of the convert and the mental, ritual and moral setting of the fundamentalist group, but also *deconversion* finds an explanation: If such a 'fit' does not emerge or declines for whatever reason, disaffiliation is the most likely consequence. Contrastive comparison of the cases allowed us to locate them in a typology. Three types of fundamentalist biographies or 'careers' could be identified: (a) a 'type governed by tradition' who, innocent of alternatives, has been born into or grown into a fundamentalist orientation; (b) the 'mono-convert', who converts as it were once in life-time into a religious orientation which he or she did not have before, and (c) the 'accumulative heretic' whose biography is a tour through different religious orientations and who represents a new type of religious socialization. Finally, a developmental perspective has been applied and we found developmental transformation and progress during membership and precipitating disaffiliation especially in the accumulative heretics, while tradition-guided deconverts and mono-convert type deconverts engage in developmental transformation only after their disaffiliation. Based on this research for the Enquete Commission, we have expanded research on deconversion on a cross-cultural scale: The *International Study on Deconversion* project compares deconversion trajectories in Germany and the U.S.A.

We can conclude that empirical research on deconversion has made some progress, since it has opened the field of research to include a broader spectrum of religious orientations and organizations and has

⁸ Results have been published in the *Final Report of the Enquete Commission* (Streib, 1998c) and as a separate research report (Streib 1998b; 2000); a brief summary is included in an article (Streib 1999), and a summary report is published on the internet (Streib 2002).

made attempts to include a developmental perspective in the analysis. However, deficits remain to be resolved, one of them is that the concepts used and the methodological designs across the studies are not consistent and make comparison of the results difficult. But I hope that it has become visible how research on deconversion can contribute to and encourage the research on deinstitutionalization.

The Variety of Directions of Deinstitutionalization of Religion

Bromley's typology and also research on deconversion suggest that we have to take into account a variety of deinstitutionalization avenues and directions. I present a list of several possibilities. The starting point are religious organizations, and, for our purpose, allegiant organizations and religious institutions in particular. Besides religious switching that does not fall in the category of deinstitutionalization, deinstitutionalization may include one or more of the following developments or actions:

1. *Secularizing exit*: Abandonment of (concern with) religious belief systems (secularization)
2. *Change to higher tension*: Adopting a different belief system of, or engaging in different ritual praxis in, or affiliation with, a higher-tension, more subversive religious organization (conversion, e.g. in fundamentalist or new religious group)
3. *Change to lower tension*: Adopting a different belief system of, or engaging in different ritual praxis in, or affiliation with, a less institutionalized, e.g. a contestant religious organization
4. *Privatizing defection*: Deinstitutionalization as termination of membership or participation, but continuity of deinstitutionalized private religious belief and private religious praxis
5. *Heretical defection*: Individual heretical and possibly accumulative appropriation of new belief system(s) or engagement in different religious praxis—for which subjects use words like 'spiritual' and 'inter-religious' orientation.

Of course, there are, below and long before official defection, 'silent' changes which we may call 'internal deinstitutionalization', a tacit-centrifugal momentum which makes the variety of deinstitutionalization avenues even more diverse. Also, I want to mention at least that I include—and suggest to incorporate this in the empirical investigation—a perspective of faith development. Deinstitutionalization trajectories and deconversion trajectories are biographical movements which

we may be able to describe also in terms of stage or style transitions. Of course, we have to reckon with the possibility that there is no stage or style transformation associated with deconversion or deinstitutionalization. But in many of our cases, we see a movement from one stage or style to another.⁹ Results from our study of deconversion indicate that deconverts score higher on the faith development scale compared to the members of their religious communities from which they have disaffiliated.

Concluding Theses

I conclude my approach to the concept of 'deinstitutionalization' with the following theses:

1. The concept of 'deinstitutionalization' is necessary for understanding religion in contemporary culture, the more the taken-for-granted authority, legitimacy, obligation and stability of religious institutions declines and religious orientation follows the heretical imperative;
2. The concept of 'deinstitutionalization' is a promising candidate for a plausible description of the processes of departure from religious organizations and the loss which contemporary religion suffers in the public domain. It has the potential of contributing to a consensus, since it rests on a clear and easy sociological perspective, but is open for considering an open variety of causes and effects. The candidate however is not perfect and needs clarification;
3. The concept of 'deinstitutionalization' would be insufficient for fully understanding religion and religious disaffiliation in contemporary culture, if it exclusively focused on organizational affiliation and rather demonstrative departures; it needs expansion to include the biographical dimension and attention to the individual's faith, its diversity of forms and its dynamics of change. Deinstitutionalization thus has to be interpreted by deconversion.

⁹ However, I do not have theoretical reservation and, less so, empirical prejudice against transformations which disappoint strict structural-developmental expectations, developmental transformations which display "downward" movements or "regressions" such as we see in in fundamentalist revivals.

Deinstitutionalized Religion—Toward a Conceptualization

So far, I have paid attention mainly to the process of deinstitutionalization of religion and have left aside the question of the result of this process. Now it is time to take up this question and discuss the question of what is left after the process of 'deinstitutionalizing of religion'? What kind of religious praxis can we expect?

What is left after the 'Deinstitutionalization of Religion'?

One can deduce from Luckmann's analysis that, after the process of deinstitutionalization, religion is transformed into 'invisible religion'. Invisibility means not less, but also not much more than the loss of institutional visibility—or, as we can say, publicly explicit obligation, legitimacy and authority. Luckmann's claim, however, that religion does not disappear, but only becomes invisible, has not gone unquestioned and has provoked contradiction. Thereby, Luckmann's invisible religion sometimes gets confused with alternative religion, new religion or even superstition. Pollack and Pickel (2003) for example have correctly observed in their re-analysis and own investigation on religious migration in Germany that the net loss of church members is by far larger than the growth of new religious groups and also greater than the rise of what they understand as alternative religious beliefs and practices. From this, Pollack and Pickel conclude that the secularizing defection is greater than the rise of unchurched alternative and new religion. It is then Pollack's and Pickel's final conclusion that Luckmann's assumption does not withstand empirical scrutiny.

While there can be no doubt that the disaffiliation rate from the churches does by far exceed the rise of new religious groups, and while it cannot be ignored that a portion of disaffiliates chose to quit concern with any religion, Pollack's and Pickel's instruments for analyzing 'invisible' religion are inadequate. It requires more to measure 'invisible religion' than including, in a questionnaire, some items which ask for the practice of yoga and meditation, for belief in magic, astrology and reincarnation and for new age values. The range and depth of Luckmann's concept of invisible religion is more comprehensive: It includes not only private beliefs, values and rituals, but also 'invisible' equivalents of religion.

No doubt, here we enter a complex field; and the more individuals take the deinstitutionalizing avenue, the more variants of 'deinstitutionalized

religion' may emerge. We would need to search for a more intelligent way to assess deinstitutionalized and invisible religion. And there is a rather recent avenue in the scientific research on religion which deserves attention: the research on "spirituality".

Research on Spirituality and Spiritual Quest

It is perhaps one of the most interesting advancements in the scientific study of religion of the last years to include items for spiritual self-assessment in research instruments. Marler and Hadaway (2002) report results from various studies in the U.S.A. on the spirituality/religion question. Comparing the results of previous studies (Marler & Hadaway 2002; Roof 1999; Scott 2001; Zinnbauer et al. 1997), we see an overall correspondence: Besides a majority of about 2/3 who say they are both religious and spiritual, we see segments of almost 20% who say "I am spiritual but not religious."

In a study in 2001, we have collected data on young adults simultaneously in Germany and the U.S.A. (Streib 2005).¹⁰ Results show 20,7% of German and 31,3% adolescents in the U.S.A. who identify themselves as being "more spiritual than religious." Comparing the U.S.-American and German adolescents, it stands out that almost one third of the German adolescents describe themselves as "neither spiritual nor religious", and the number of subjects who describe themselves as "more religious than spiritual" is 29,8% in the German sample—twice as large as in the U.S. sample. Thus, the percentage of self-identified more spiritual adolescents in the U.S.-American sample is significantly higher than in the German sample.

I add an interesting detail from the result of our study on deconversion which also allows the comparison of deconverts from new religious fundamentalist groups (NRM) and members of those groups: While the majority of NRM members regard themselves as "more religious than spiritual" and at the same time appear relatively cautious toward

¹⁰ The sample consisted of 202 German university students who had just taken up studies; the U.S. sample consisted of 295 freshmen. The questionnaire included 158 questions: some demographic questions, the five personality factors (Big Five, IPIP), the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger 1992), the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer 1996). In the demographic section, we asked our subjects to mark one of the following statements: "I am more religious than spiritual", "I am more spiritual than religious", "I am equally religious and spiritual" and "I am neither religious nor spiritual."

the self-assessment of being spiritual, over 40% of the *deconverts* identify themselves as being "more spiritual than religious." We may interpret this as significant development of *spiritual quest* in deconverts from NRMs.

Of course, the question remains what the research participants really mean when they identify themselves as being 'spiritual' rather than religious. The meaning of the word 'spirituality' is rather fuzzy, and it may signify something different in the U.S.A than 'spirituell' in German usage. But, taken together, research results on spiritual self-assessment pose the question of whether self-declared 'spiritual' subjects have been invisible to research so far, since they have asked only for the self-assessment of 'being religious'.

Looking back on the statistical research, the type of 'spiritual seeker' who describes him- or herself as 'more spiritual than religious' could be identified, but this would suggest to sharpen our research instruments.

Changes in the Religious Landscape

Support for the assumption that deinstitutionalized religion has gained ground and may have changed the religious landscape comes from empirical research. Beaudoin's (1998) study and Roof's (1993; 1999) research suggest 'spiritual quest' as label for changes in the religious landscape in the U.S.A. which can be focused on the baby boomer generation or the cohort called Generation X.

Roof presents results from a very large number of interviews, partially in longitudinal research. And he suggests that

the boundaries of popular religious communities are now being redrawn, encouraged by the quest of the large, post-World War II generations, and facilitated by the rise of an expanded spiritual marketplace (1999, 10).¹¹

¹¹ His characterization of the new situation reads as follows: "A great variety of terms now in vogue signal such a shift in the center of religious energy: inwardness, subjectivity, the experiential, the expressive, the spiritual. Inherited forms of religion persist and still influence people but, as Marty says, 'the individual seeker and chooser has come increasingly to be in control.' Nowhere is this greater emphasis upon the seeker more apparent, than in the large chain bookstore: the old 'religion' section is gone and in its place is a growing set of more specific rubrics catering to popular topics such as angels, Sufism, journey, recovery, meditation, magic, inspiration, Judaica, astrology, gurus, Bible, prophecy, Evangelicalism, Mary, Buddhism, Catholicism, esoterica, and the like. Words like *soul*, *sacred*, and *spiritual* resonate to a curious public. The discourse on spiritual 'journeys' and 'growth' is now a province not just of theologians

Roof's new map of the religious landscape includes several subcultures: Dogmatists, Mainstream Believers, and Born-again Christians, but also Metaphysical Believers/Spiritual Seekers and Secularists. But interestingly, Roof explicitly distinguishes the different types of religious orientations along the axes of 'religious identity' and 'spiritual identity'.¹²

Beaudoin aims at a 'thick description' of the type of spiritual seeker. He does not present a single statistic, but provides an excellent characterization of Generation X's spiritual quest. He (1998, 36) maintains that ambiguity is central to the faith of Generation X, "Xers make great heretics" (121).¹³ However, in the midst of such heretical adventure, Beaudoin identifies a search for a unique spirituality, a 'spiritual quest' which is nevertheless characterized by irreverence and *bricolage*.¹⁴

With the focus of their research, Roof and Beaudoin have put forth an interesting thesis for discussion, a question which we may need to investigate further in the framework of deinstitutionalized religion: Is it especially the generations of baby boomers and the Generation X in which greater numbers of adolescents and young adults have departed from the religious ways of their parents and transformed their religious orientation and practice? It can be hypothesized that the irreverence and bricolage model has influenced ways of dealing with religion and spirituality in the wider society in the U.S.A. and in Europe.

and journalists, but of ordinary people in cafes, coffee bars, and bookstores across the country." (Roof 1999: 7)

¹² Spirituality, Roof says (1993, 64) in way of a definition, "gives expression to the being that is in us; it has to do with feelings, with the power that comes from within, with knowing our deepest selves and what is sacred to us".

¹³ "When Madonna—and Xers—practice their religiosity with sacramentals, from prayer cards and holy water to ripped jeans, piercings, crucifixes, and dark makeup, they challenge the authority of the official sacraments and the institution that 'dispenses' them. They threaten to displace the center with the margins. This is just the beginning of a larger blurring of what is considered orthodox with what was considered heterodox, or heretical." (Beaudoin 1998, 122)

¹⁴ "A central dynamic and challenge emerging for Generation X is that of 'bricolaging' their own spirituality and carrying forward religious traditions. *Bricolage* means making do with the materials at hand to solve particular (in this case religious) problems and questions. This term describes the way GenX pop culture brings together diverse religious symbols and images, forever recombining and forming new spiritualities. GenX pop culture does not respect the boundaries of tradition or religious dogma. At the same time that such bricolating and reassembling become even more widespread in GenX pop culture, Xers are challenged to renew their own spiritualities and those of their religious traditions by giving the concept of tradition itself a fresh look." (Beaudoin 1998, 178)

Contours of a Conceptualization of 'Deinstitutionalized Religion'

In preparation of my conceptualization of 'deinstitutionalized religion', I would like to state, what I do not propose: I resist the proposals to accept 'spirituality' as scientific concept, as some colleagues in psychology suggest. Some even envision that, in the future, we will rename our departments, societies and textbooks and combine or even substitute 'religion' with 'spirituality' (Zinnbauer et al. 1997). I have some doubt that this project of conceptual and even organizational substitution will stand theoretical, philosophical, let alone theological scrutiny. Unless someone writes a convincing theory of spirituality,¹⁵ I regard 'spirituality' as self-description of the subjects in research who indicate that they are looking for something else than traditional and established religion. But theoretically, 'spirituality' is all but a well defined concept.¹⁶ Since, in the conceptualization of 'spirituality', the overlapping of religion and spirituality is increasingly acknowledged and definitions of spirituality as "a search of the sacred" (Pargament 1997; 1999; Zinnbauer et al. 1999) or response to the numinous (Elkins 2001) are put forward, I see less reason to re-invent the wheel. Instead, I suggest taking into consideration proposals which continue to work with the concept of 'religion', but may add certain adjectives. I find this procedure more promising, because it allows for an inclusion of the century old controversial, but intelligent debate on the conceptualization of 'religion'. The suggestion to endorse the adjective 'deinstitutionalized' to identify specific forms of religion, appears promising to me. 'Deinstitutionalized religion' covers to large extent what 'spirituality' is expected to signify. But 'deinstitutionalized religion' could prove as a more solid and more comprehensive concept. But, nevertheless—or exactly therefore—it is necessary to interpret and qualify this concept.

For a qualification of the concept of 'deinstitutionalized religion', however, it is not wise to draw exclusively on the monothetic theories and definitions of religion which we derive for example from

¹⁵ I doubt that Emmons' (1999) *Psychology of Ultimate Concerns* meets such criteria.

¹⁶ One of the major problems, from my perspective, is that 'spirituality' belongs to the kind of collective psychological maneuvers in modernity by which we desire the denial of negativity, of the shadow, the dark side of human experience, of terror and destruction. Or are there studies on psychological or social destruction associated with 'spirituality'? What we find increasingly and what receives extensive funding are studies on the positive effect of religion or spirituality on health, well-being. I am concerned that we are poorly equipped for an analysis of terror and destruction through religion and spirituality.

Luckmann's (1967) or Luhmann's (1977; 2000) works.¹⁷ Polythetic approaches are more helpful such as Kaufmann's (1989) or Thomas' (2001) who has developed a theory of implicit religion mainly on the basis of Kaufmann's perspective.¹⁸

Kaufmann's perspective may be especially helpful for an understanding of deinstitutionalized religion. In his approach to conceptualize religion in its functional multi-dimensionality, Kaufmann lists six problem zones in which religion has a stake and plays an active role:

1. Binding of affect and coping with anxiety
2. Conduct in the non-everyday realm in form of ritual and moral praxis
3. Processing of contingencies
4. Legitimation of community building and social integration
5. Cosmization of the world or the construction of frames of meaning
6. Distanceation from the established social state of affairs—leading to resistance and protest.

These problem zones, in which religion has a stake and is active, correspond to great extent to Glock's five dimensions and to my criteria of identifying deconversion. For a conceptualization of religion and deinstitutionalized religion, however, Kaufmann's six zones appear adequate, because they are more comprehensive and, at the same time, more specific: They embrace, in a rather cumulative or multi-perspective manner, and can be associated with, a variety of theoretical conceptualizations of religion, but these are not taken as mutually exclusive.

When these zones of religious concern are covered by a single religion, we have a stable and homogeneous religious situation with a

¹⁷ Nevertheless, Luckmann's concept of invisible religion has an important contribution to make for the analysis of religion in an age of individualization in which the taken-for-granted authority, and legitimacy of religious institutions has declined. Thus deinstitutionalized religion, its invisibility, is characterized by withdrawal from the established religious institutions and the development of individualized forms of religion. This process is also understandable in Luhmann's framework of differentiation of social systems.

¹⁸ Of course, Thomas' work takes up the term 'implicit religion' which has been coined by Bailey (1997), but Bailey is mentioned only as a starting point in the introduction. Thomas, in his voluminous work, goes through much of the sociological conceptualizations of religion from Weber and Durkheim, Luckmann and Luhmann to define religion in a polythetic manner with special reference to Smart and Kaufmann.

visible religious praxis. But, the more these functions are not fulfilled anymore by one religious institution, but rather other institutions in society have taken on some of these functions, we cannot identify this as religion in the full sense as it used to be. But 'religion' is still identifiable, when at least a number of these zones or functions are covered by a religious praxis or system of beliefs. This opens a new perspective for analysis of deinstitutionalized religion: to identify the components or fragments of religion. Deinstitutionalized religion, I conclude, can be identified only by fragments of religious functions—even when they are not identifiable as religion on the first glimpse, but are derivatives from visible religion.

Concluding Remark: Research and Desiderata in Deinstitutionalized Religion

I conclude with remarks on research. Certainly, it is necessary to continue investigation of religious affiliation and disaffiliation, in order to arrive at a better statistical account of religious migrations—and perhaps be able to draw maps of the religious landscapes in many countries. But the survey instruments need improvement which firstly means to ask consistent questions across the cultures, but secondly, and more important, to investigate not only formal religious affiliation and assent to traditional doctrinal beliefs, but also and especially religious experiences, religious functions and religious praxis. Deinstitutionalized religion is more than loss of membership and dissent with central beliefs. Kaufmann's zones could be of great help in identifying new items. And, as I have tried to make the case: Research on the self-assessment of being 'spiritual' or 'more spiritual than religious' should be continued in the U.S.A., but should also spread across the continents.

Furthermore, it would be very helpful for understanding the processes of deinstitutionalization of religion and of deinstitutionalized religion, if we engaged in studying milieus within and outside religious organizations. First milieu studies in German churches—I am aware of the studies in the Protestant Church of Hannover (Vögele, Bremer, & Vester 2002) and the Fourth Investigation of Church Members in the Protestant churches in Germany which has included a milieu aspect (Huber, Friedrich & Steinacker 2006)—seem promising.

Finally, research on deconversion could help to understand the deinstitutionalization process of religion and, at the same time, the dynamics of deinstitutionalized religion. In our study of deconversion, we have

begun with a special focus on qualitative biographical-reconstructive investigation, including the faith development perspective and a battery of quantitative instruments, and we aim at a typology of deconversion trajectories.¹⁹ I would wish for an expansion of this research to include not only the U.S.A. and Germany, but more countries and religious cultures. In the 21st century religious situation, I regard research on deinstitutionalized religion as an important project not only because of concern for the individual religious person and his or her development, but also because of concern for organized religion. Perhaps the people at the periphery and beyond the margins of organized religion may have important messages to convey toward the center.

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¹⁹ For results, see our web site at: <http://www.homes.uni-bielefeld.de/religionsforschung/>.

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RETHINKING CHURCH IN LIQUID MODERNITY

Kees de Groot

Introduction

A specter is haunting the Christian world—the specter of the liquid church.¹ Solid churches try to expel it or to contain it; nevertheless, a movement is starting to appear. New manifestations of being church are taking shape, whereas the old institutions are eroding continuously. Websites, festivals, religious publications, and gatherings suggest a network of Christian believers, characterized by a positive evaluation of ‘postmodernity’, and transcending the distinctions between Conservatives and Liberals. This Church movement appears under various names (Price 2002): Emerging Church, Next Wave, New Paradigm, and Liquid Church.

This paper addresses the concept of liquid church, which may be tentatively defined as de-institutionalized Christian religion that still bears some resemblance to the church as we know it, or the communication of Christ in a network. Drawing on the distinction between early, or ‘solid’, modernity and late, or ‘liquid’, modernity, this concept promises to open up possibilities to interpret and evaluate forms of religious praxis outside the institutionalized church as manifestations of being church, nonetheless. Religious praxis that takes place outside the regime of religious institutions is often interpreted at an individual level. The concept of liquid church may serve to hold on to an analysis of religion on a social level, even when it has emigrated from the church as an institution.

Pete Ward is a lecturer in Youth Ministry and Theological Education at King’s College London. His *Liquid Church* has been well received within the Christian community. It started a global debate,² and has been translated into the Dutch language (Ward 2004). In Fall 2004, in a search for ‘liquid church’, Google provided 378 ‘most relevant’ hits. This score provides a rough indication of how widely discussed

¹ See De Groot (2006a) for an earlier version of this article.

² For one of the many reviews, see Andre Perriman at www.opensourcetheology.net. For an interview with the author, see www.youthspecialties.com.