

**Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta**

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## **“RELIGION AND MODERNITY. AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON”**

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Discussing the two central concepts of the investigation - religion and modernity, especially their relationship, this book represents a significantly new approach to the problem of religious change in modern societies that combines conclusions of theoretical relevance with profound empirical analyses.

Although the empirical part prevails in the book, Pollack and Rosta point out that it's never possible to capture the entire diversity of reality empirically. Theoretical reflections are therefore unavoidable for empirical work not only because they determine the object of study but also because they provide the framework that determines the significance of the facts. The book began with extensive theoretical reflections, as the authors said: “Without theoretical distinctions our empirical and historical findings would be blind”.

From their own reflections on the concept of modernity and religion, the book's authors developed the guiding questions for their investigation. Avoiding a purely theoretical perspective on religious changes, Pollack and Rosta examine the factors and conditions that have contributed to the religion changes in modern societies and research questions in such a manner that they are concerned not only with describing the process of religious change, but also with illuminating the conditions and factors that determine change. The nature of religion changes is inevitably tied back to the cultural, political and legal context. Correlations between religious and social change that are verifiable under the influence of certain contextual variables may vary in different social context. For example, growing religion pluralism may encourage tendencies of Christian self-assertiveness in strongly Catholic countries, such as Poland, Croatia, Italy, but have little effect in regions with weak Christian roots.

The empirical part of the book begins with the analyses of religious change in Western and Eastern Europe. When it comes to the processes of religious change, it is especially important to go beyond the horizon of Western Europe. For the sake of comparison, the authors also considered the United States, whose political, legal and economic conditions are very similar to those in Western Europe, but whose religious landscape is fundamentally different. Both religiously vibrant and among the most economically advanced countries in the world, the US is particularly useful for the investigation of the relationship between religion and modernity. The comparison of Western Europe and the United States makes

up the core of this analysis, but the investigation also included quite different cases such as Eastern Europe, South Korea and the Pentecostal movement as a phenomenon of obvious global importance.

On the basis of these selected case studies, the authors identified patterns and determinants of religious change in modern and modernizing societies. Their studies were also motivated by the hope of discovering new patterns of interpretation in the individual case studies; those that go beyond the familiar models in the sociology of religion that are provided by secularization theory, individualization theory and the theory of the economic market.

Only after conducting the empirical case studies do the authors offer some general theoretical conclusions that rely on the empirical findings and propose determining factors and patterns lying behind the religious changes witnessed by modern societies.

Thus, the book adopts an empirically-based, multi-paradigmatic perspective containing various theoretical elements. Such profound synthesis of theoretical reflections and empirical analysis is what makes *Religion and Modernity* mandatory reading.

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