Karl-Fritz Daiber: English Abstract: Report on the Discussions

Initially, the workshop was intended to provide new insights on three different levels:
1. on the level of phenomenal description,
2. on the level of developing a theory of religious organisation,
3. on the level of clarifying the self-image of religious communities (problems of core and margins) and the social conditions of inter-religious dialogue.

Clarifying the self-image of religious communities turned out to be the least important aspect. Merely Mady Laeyendecker-Thung spoke of aims of inter-religious dialogue, yet this issue did not prove to be relevant for the course of the workshop.

The same is true regarding the self-image of religious communities (problems of core and margins, elite vs. mass religion). The problem was mentioned several times, from different perspectives, yet was not central for the discussions.

On the level of phenomenal descriptions, the workshop provided the most valuable insights. Here are some of the consequences resulting from pluralising the phenomenal field for a theory of religious organisations:

The modern formation of organisations has a pre-modern history, not only in Christianity, but also in other religions. Wherever religious specialisation happens, groupings based on a individual decision for affiliation arise. These communities may not necessarily be organisations in the sense of rationalised social systems. They are alike in respect to the decision for membership.

Religious groupings like that and thus religious organisations create a difference between 'outside' and 'inside'. To distinguish core and margins of a religious community contributes further to this topic.

Depending on the respective social system, religious organisations serve different purposes. They are relatively flexible in response to functional assignation. The respective functions of religious organisations in the narrower sense and religious groupings based on membership rules in the wider sense not only depend on modernisation processes – they also help to produce modernisation themselves.

The formation of religious organisations turns out to be extremely dependent on three determinants of their social context:
1. the socio-cultural characteristics and the inherent cultural patterns, corresponding to which organisations of ethnic or religious minorities (or more generally spoken; grouping with divergent religious patterns) must show themselves to advantage,
2. the structural preconditions of national states, their understanding of religious freedom and religion and their development of religious law.
3. the global influences of partial international religious systems (global religious organisations) as well as the growingly universal principles of the national state, e.g. the tendency to separate state and religion.

Finally, the apparent continuity of religious culture shows that religious organisations only partly cover religion as a whole. On the local level, this leads to religious service centres, such as temples, monasteries, church buildings, in addition to membership-based organisations. Due to what they offer, these centres interest people who are not firmly affiliated as formal members. Both, organisations and service centres characterise the presence of religion. Moreover it is an open question to which extent the affiliation with social groupings that are not a matter of free choice (families; local/ ethnic/national communities) effects individual decisions concerning social affiliations, so that individual options of choice may not fully be realised.

As the analyses demonstrated, the relative variety of societal and cultural contexts showed an empirical complexity. Up to now, the theoretical discussions and outlines in German sociologies of religion imply the background of Christian (if not to say: secular) culture. The results based on these outlines are by no means wrong, but biased, since they relate too little to developments in other cultural contexts. Against this background, pluralising the phenomenal field gives a new impetus to further research, not least for co-operating with religious science and sociology.