Organizing "Private Religion"

Types of Governance in US Protestantism

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Abstract *According to Luckmann, the new social form of religion in modern societies is the private form, which is characterized by the rise of a consumer mentality. However, religious consumers can only emerge when religious organizations provide the options for consumer choices. Consumer religion is associated with a particular pattern of church organization, which is best represented by the megachurch model and is similar to processes in the field of higher education. To identify this pattern, I introduce the "governance equalizer", an instrument that was developed for the field of higher education. The analysis of governance patterns proceeds in three steps. First, I discuss three types of elementary mechanisms of governance forms: mutual observation, influence, and negotiation. Second, I differentiate types of actors in US Protestantism: individual believers, communities, congregations, denominations, and special purpose groups. Third, building on constellations of mutual negotiation, I distinguish six types of governance forms in US Protestantism: (1) denominational regulation, (2) democratic self-governance, (3) hierarchical self-governance, (4) stakeholder guidance, (5) competition, and (6) network governance. Finally, I discuss the role of organizations in the formation of private religion.*

Keywords *governance, legitimation, megachurch model, privatized religion, social form of religion, United States*

1. Introduction

How does religion show itself in modern societies? This was the leading question for Thomas Luckmann, who considered a social form of religion broadly as a "social arrangement between collective religious representations and the social structure" (Luckmann 2003: 279). Following Émile Durkheim, Luckmann

studies religious change from a functionalist perspective and states that religion is "not a passing phase in the evolution of mankind but a universal aspect of the conditio humana" (ibid.: 276). The social form of religion describes how the religious core of a worldview is related to the social and normative order of society.[1] Therefore, Luckmann's concept of the social form of religion not only refers to organizational types, such as markets, networks, and events but also considers the relationship between institutional forms and religious ideas (see the introduction to this volume). How are religious ideas and worldviews institutionalized in modern societies?

With the spread of secularization and the progressing functional differentiation of spheres – politics, economy, science, education, art, etc. – the social form of "privatized religion" emerged, which resulted from the "demonopolization" of the production and distribution of worldviews and the despecialization of religion. In this social form, the sacred cosmos depends on the private sphere and on secondary institutions[2] Knoblauch (2010) later described as "popular religion". This means that religious socialization is not necessarily a part of primary socialization, in which individuals encounter an objective social structure that is mediated by significant others (such as parents, siblings, and teachers). No general obligatory model exists anymore that relates religious values to the social and normative order of society. Instead, a plurality of worldviews and institutional forms develop that (in principle) become available to everyone. Multiple "sacred cosmoses" represent religious and nonreligious worldviews and compete with each other. Luckmann (2003) and Berger (1963) use the concept of the "market" as a metaphor to describe this new form of

1 Luckmann does that by distinguishing analytically between personality, structure, and culture. Personality refers to the individual's unique pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and serves as the mediating mechanism between the individual and society. Social structure describes the organized patterns of social relationships and institutions that make up society including norms and values, roles, institutions, and patterns of social interaction. Culture provides a framework for understanding the world, shaping individual behavior, and maintaining social order (Parsons/Platt 1973).

2 This term refers to Berger and Luckmann's distinction between "primary" and "secondary" socialization. "Secondary socialization is the internalization of institutional or institution-based 'subworlds'. (…) [It] requires the acquisition of role-specific vocabularies, which means, for one thing, the internalization of semantic fields structuring routine interpretations and conduct within an institutional area" (Berger/Luckmann 1967: 138).

religion; others talk of "event-structured", "hyper-mediatized", and "spiritual" forms of religion (Gauthier 2014).

With the rise of the private form of religion, religious communities are increasingly operating in competitive environments.[3] Unlike the fields of art, science, health, and sports, religions receive less or no financial support from the government to carry out their activities. Although many European nation-states still maintain a cooperative relationship with religion and churches enjoy special privileges, these special rights are often more historical remnants. In particular, in the United States, religious organizations must grow on their own merit. Therefore, in the discourse on the "governance of religion", the dominant question is not how to enhance the effectiveness of religion (as in the case of education and science) but rather how to manage religious diversity and restrain or contain the power of religious communities (Schuppert 2012; 2017). The state's role in this context is primarily to institutionally safeguard pluralism and nonviolence (Kern/Pruisken 2018).

In the competitive environment of private religion, religious organizations need to draw in members with their offerings. The social form of private religion necessarily builds not only on religious consumers but also on religious providers. Consequently, culturally pluralized religion also faces a pluralization of religious organizational forms. Although the rational-choice approach to religion has repeatedly emphasized the market-like nature of religion, it has neglected the pluralization of religious organizational forms. This is accompanied by the fact that established organizational sociology has only been sporadically integrated into the sociology of religion (and vice versa) (Petzke/Tyrell 2012; Tracey/Phillips/Lounsbury 2014). The development of types of social forms in religion has not been incorporated into current debates in organizational sociology.

However, despite differences from other societal fields, there is no reason to assume that established instruments of governance and organizational research should not be applicable to religious organizations as well. Religious actors in modern societies copy and enact organizational models from other

3 By using the concept of "competitive environments," I draw on Meyer and Rowan's (1977) distinction between competitive and institutional environments. Meyer and Rowan focus on the degree of legitimacy of organizations. While organizations in competitive environments must struggle for their survival, organizations in institutional environments can survive even if they are not successful, yet still perceived as legitimate by the environment.

societal fields, such as economy, science, and education, and from the nonprofit sector. This is particularly true for the "megachurches", which have transformed US Protestantism in the last decades. In addition, similar to religion in the United States, the state has withdrawn from direct control over many societal sectors in modern societies. Since the 1970s, management concepts have diffused to noneconomic fields and have promoted an arrangement in which the state stops regulating universities, schools, and other public organizations directly (as part of the implementation of New Public Management) (De Boer/Enders/Schimank 2007; OECD 2010). In this setting, organizations are increasingly expected to define their goals and evaluate their outcomes (Krücken/Meier 2006; Brunsson/Sahlin-Andersson 2000).

Scholars studying the governance of universities and research organizations have emphasized the need to examine the elementary mechanisms that constitute forms, such as market, state, and event. For example, markets in modern capitalism are by no means solely based on exchange under competitive conditions. Instead, markets are shaped by other elementary mechanisms, such as hierarchy and networks, as well as mutual and reciprocal adjustment (Schimank 2007b: 34). However, a systematic analysis of various governance forms, as has been conducted in higher-education research, is lacking for the field of religion so far. Although many individual studies and theoretical approaches have been conducted, they tend to lack a common analytical basis that can be built on (see for example Krech et al. 2013).

In the first part of the paper, I briefly present the state of research on the governance of religion. In the second part, I develop an analytical tool for analyzing organizational structures of religion in three steps. First, following Schimank, I discuss three types of elementary mechanisms of governance forms: mutual observation, influence, and negotiation. Second, I differentiate types of actors in religious fields. Third, building on this, I distinguish six types of governance forms in religion that build on constellations of mutual negotiation. In the third part, I discuss the role of organizations for the private form of religion.

2. The governance of religion

Research on governance originated in the economic discussion on theories of the market and the role of firms on markets (Coase 1937; Williamson 1973, 1993) and in the political science discussion on the changing role of the state and the

rise of nonhierarchical forms of action coordination (Mayntz 2004). According to Mayntz, governance describes "the sum of all kinds of existing forms of the collective regulation of societal circumstances, including institutionalized forms of self-regulation of civil society, different joint activities of public and private actors as well as sovereign actions of governmental actors." (ibid.: 66, own translation). Mayntz suggests a continuum of governmental regulation on the one hand and civil self-regulation on the other. Against this background, Mayntz, Scharpf, and others define state-related sectors as those that do not fulfil core governmental functions[4] but that nevertheless bear a degree of responsibility for important social causes. Examples are science, education, and health (Mayntz/Scharpf 1995: 13–14).

Religion has not been included in these analyses of Mayntz, Scharpf, Schimank, and others. Religion can be characterized by its particular role: It is not a state-related sector that is deemed so important in a plural, secular society that it would be supported by the state. Rather, religion is considered a private matter. The public claim of religion is shifting from the state to civil society (Casanova 1994). Sociological studies on religion that use the concept of governance do so especially when examining how the state influences or regulates religious diversity. In the sociology of religion, the discussion on the governance of religion revolves around the question of how the regulatory potential of religion can be dealt with (Schuppert 2017; Burchardt 2020; Koenig 2009). From a legal perspective, many researchers have examined national differences in national constitutions, jurisprudence, and church financing (cf. Martikainen 2013). Additionally, researchers have explored how Islam is dealt with in Europe (Koenig 2007). Depending on the national context, the state can assume different roles and act as a regulator and promoter of religion, especially concerning religious peace or ecumenism (Körs/Nagel 2018).

Especially in the US sociology of religion, the rational-choice approach to religion has become established, focusing on the regulatory role of the state (Stark/Finke 2000; Finke/Stark 1992; Iannaccone et al. 1997). The more the state regulates religion and therefore favors certain religious communities, the less competition is possible, the argument goes. Consequently, this hinders religious participation. This approach has been criticized from methodological and theoretical perspectives (Kern/Pruisken 2018; Voas et al. 2002). Religious markets do not form "spontaneously", as claimed by the economics of reli-

4 As, for example, the police.

gion, but are the result of demanding processes of institutionalization (Kern/Pruisken 2018).

In this article, I take a different approach. I use a well-established concept in the fields of science and higher-education research and apply it to the case of US Protestantism. Initially, both fields, that of European universities and research organizations and that of US religion, differ significantly: The regulation and financing of universities and research organizations in Europe are the responsibility of the state whereas in the US, religion and the state are comparatively strictly separated. Nevertheless, the method of governance analysis can be applied to the US Protestant field because it operates at such a high level of abstraction that it can be employed across fields.

3. Governance analysis of US Protestantism

A detailed analysis of governance forms in a focal field includes three steps. First, elementary mechanisms must be distinguished. Second, the question of who the relevant actors who interact with each other are needs to be addressed. Based on these two steps, relevant governance forms in the religious field can be described.

3.1 Elementary Mechanisms

What are the elementary mechanisms that constitute joint actions and the intentional design of governance forms? Schimank distinguishes between three types of elementary mechanisms: (1) mutual observation, (2) mutual influence, and (3) mutual negotiation. These three elementary mechanisms are produced in actor constellations in which actors have to deal with the interdependencies that emerge among them. The mechanisms ensure that two or more actors can reliably coordinate their actions relative to each other, making them predictable for both parties. In this process, they establish a relatively enduring social order for this constellation (Schimank 2016: chapter 8–10; 2007b).

Constellations of mutual observation are the most elementary of the three types of constellations. In this mode, the coordination of action occurs through mutual adjustment to the perceived actions of others, including anticipated actions. In the case of one-sided adjustment, the actions of the others are considered unaffected by one's own actions. In the case of mutual adjustment,

one takes into account that the other person is also adjusting to oneself – as a sequence of actions and reactions, where the initiative can come from either side at different times, or as simultaneous mutual actions that respond to each other's anticipated actions. The management of interdependencies between actors in constellations of mutual observation can occur occasionally or can solidify in recurring episodes.

For example, the worship service in any given congregation is a recurring event in which actors coordinate their behavior by observing what the other congregants are doing. A new visitor will intuitively observe how the members of the congregation dress as well as whether they stand up or sit and sing or do not sing. The new visitor can adjust her actions one-sidedly, but the members of the congregations may notice that there is a new visitor and adjust their actions to her as well, for example by way of a friendly greeting or, quite the opposite, by ignoring the newcomer. Mutual observations are the key mechanisms for the constitution of communities and markets. In constellations of mutual influence, influence potentials, such as money, knowledge, emotions, and power, are deliberately employed (Schimank 2016). Situations in which one actor possesses enough influence potential to completely impose their will on another actor are, however, relatively rare. Therefore, interdependencies between actors are managed through a balance of influence potentials. Less significant are sporadic forms of coordination; continuous influence relationships take precedence. The concept of "influence potentials" builds on Talcott Parsons's concept of "generalized media". Parsons conceptualizes power, influence, and value commitments in the spheres of community, politics, and culture as functional equivalents for money in the economic system (Parsons 1963a, 1963b, 1968). Whereas money and power directly influence an actor's situation, value commitments and influence can only be used to change actors' intentions (Habermas 1980).[5] Money and power can directly alter an actor's

5 Habermas employs his renowned distinction between instrumental action and communicative action to elucidate the differences in potentials for influence. Communicative action is aimed at fostering understanding or establishing social bonds. This approach relies on the mutual exchange of arguments, seeking to cultivate a consensus on specific truths, norms, or values. Conversely, instrumental action is focused on attaining particular outcomes or objectives by manipulating an actor's physical or social surroundings. In this context, power and money serve as tools, directly impacting an actor's situation. However, the influence exerted through value commitments and persuasion is more subtle, indirectly shaping actors' intentions by engaging with their convictions and beliefs.

circumstances by providing or withholding resources (in the case of money) or by exerting control or authority (in the case of power). For example, offering a financial incentive can compel someone to act in a certain way, and using authority can force compliance. Value commitments and persuasion represent a more indirect form of influence. These rely on aligning with or appealing to an actor's internal beliefs, values, or principles. Instead of compelling change through external pressure, they aim to shift an actor's intentions by convincing them to see situations differently, reevaluate their beliefs, or adopt new values. This process is more nuanced and requires a deeper engagement with the actor's perspectives and motivations.

Generalized symbolic media govern social relations. How can ego – an individual actor, an organization, or a nation-state – impel alter to do something they do not want to do? For example, a congregation can deal with new visitors attending the service in various ways. First, they can simply ignore new visitors and thereby use no influence potentials to convince them to join their church. Second, they can try influencing new visitors to get them to return the next week or to donate money. The congregation could simply force the visitor physically to return. Christian churches used this influence potential to evangelize the non-Christian population in the colonies. However, in the mode of the private form of religion, violence is not an appropriate influence potential to bind individuals to a congregation. Rather, the congregation will have to persuade the new visitor to come back by being kind and friendly, producing a welcoming atmosphere, presenting a stimulating worship service, or wielding one's moral authority. Religious promises such as the promise of eternal life in heaven are examples of influence potentials and can be used by the congregation as well.

Religious pluralism is another typical example of a constellation of influence without a dominant actor (Schimank 2016: 298). Religious groups do not solely observe each other but may use various influence potentials to win over the unaffiliated or to exert influence over the followers of other religious groups. The opposite is a constellation in which one dominant actor structures the constellation of mutual influence. An example is the "religious monopoly" (Diotallevi 2002): countries in which one religious community (e.g., Catholicism) is dominant.

Actors in constellations of mutual influence often start to negotiate "binding agreements". When formal hierarchies, legal, or other binding (especially codified) rules are present and when actors start to act on them, we refer to situations of mutual negotiation. Negotiations' outcomes are documented in

laws, statutes, contracts, or organizational charts, managing interdependencies among actors without the need for influence potentials to be constantly present. In the case of the congregation mentioned above, the new visitor could formally apply for membership and fill out a membership application. Constellations of mutual negotiation can be purely episodic in nature, representing opportunities for one-time exchanges. For example, markets involve constellations of mutual observation among providers and consumers. Providers observe the offers, prices, and followers of other market actors. The cooperative interaction between the two parties typically results in prices in markets using the medium of money. In this context, providers and interested parties who wish to engage in business negotiate until they reach a binding agreement, typically in the form of a purchase contract, or they recognize the futility of further negotiations. In this sense, even one-time attendance of a church service can be considered a binding agreement: The worshipper participates in an event and contributes time and money, and in return, the congregation provides a compelling event.

Three abstract modes of negotiation are distinguished, forming the basis for the examination of concrete governance forms: networks, polyarchy, and hierarchy (Mayntz/Scharpf 1995; Lange/Schimank 2004: 22). In networks, collective agency relies on actors' voluntary agreement. Typical examples include political networks and corporate collaborations. The cooperation of major churches with the German state is also based on this mode of negotiation. Polyarchy is characterized by majority decisions. This pattern is often found in democratic governance forms, which are also partially present in churches. In hierarchies, decision-making authority lies with a superior governing body and is based on directives. I will come back to these three modes of negotiation in section 3.3.

3.2 Types of actors in religion

For the further identification of governance forms, it is now necessary to identify the actors who mutually observe, influence, or negotiate with each other. Various types of actors are considered in this context. On the one hand, these can be individual actors (e.g., individual believers, pastors, and ministers). The concept of an actor encompasses "entities that act meaningfully and intentionally, and to which action can be attributed by other actors" (Schimank 2016: 44–45). The choice of an action is always embedded in and shaped by a social

context that can bring about this action. Actors can also be organizations, social groups, or social movements. These are "supra-individual actors" (Schimank 2016: 327). Each supraindividual actor is a constellation of individual actors, and their actions are therefore the collaborative actions of constellations of individual actors. What is crucial is the extent to which the actions of individual actors in the constellation form an organized whole. This means that they systematically build on each other to pursue an overarching objective (Schimank 2016: 329). In this regard, binding agreements can be used to build an organized whole oriented toward a specific goal. For example, individual believers can join forces and found a congregation together with the intention to make it a megachurch in the future.

Collective actors, however, do not only emerge based on binding agreements. Through the mechanism of mutual observation, collectively shared evaluative and cognitive interpretations can also contribute to the coordination of actions. Therefore, Schimank distinguishes between collective actors who do not require binding agreements and corporate actors who rely on binding agreements (Schimank 2016: 329). An example of collective actors that form based on mutual perception of commonalities (and not on binding agreements) is the religious community (Durkheim 1995). Membership in the community is formed through perceived commonalities (Gläser 2007: 87). In the religious community, perceived commonalities are mostly the religious creeds that members of the community share with each other. These creeds are often represented by religious symbols or codes, which help the members of a community identify each other. In this way, perceived commonalities, through mutual observation, constitute the collective self-image of a community and contribute to the shaping of an identity (Kern 2008: 119). Symbolic boundaries exist in the community and toward nonmembers of the community. In the community, common values are identified as positive whereas negative judgments are attributed to the world outside the community (Alexander 2006).

In many communities, the mechanism of mutual influence is at work, such as the emergence of charisma and power as influence potentials. The communication networks in communities often revolve around elites who have a large fanbase and many followers on social media (Gläser 2007: 87). In US Evangelicalism, these famous personalities, such as Billy Graham, Joel Osteen, and Sarah Young, are revered like celebrities and shape the community members' collective beliefs, practices, and actions.

However, communities often exhibit limited collective agency. Mutual observation of perceived commonalities and identity-driven actions alone are usually insufficient for formulating collective goals and deciding on the allocation of common resources. There is a lack of an entity capable of making decisions for the community. Even if such a decision were to be reached, it would be challenging to compel the members of a community to implement it due to membership based on perception and the autonomy of its members. This weakness in endogenous governance is characteristic of spontaneous social orders that arise without actions being deliberately coordinated (Gläser 2007: 89). Whereas informal systems of rules may indeed emerge in the community, the formulation and implementation of common political or organizational goals require networks or organizations that compensate for the community's endogenous governance deficit (Gläser 2007: 89). For example, the organization of events is not possible solely through spontaneous and identity-driven actions or on the basis of mutual observation.

The realm of religion is segmented into various faith communities – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, etc. – each with its own interpretative and expectation structures in the form of dogma, behavioral guidelines, and rituals. Especially in modern Christianity, formal organizations have developed in which participation is constituted by membership (Luhmann 1964: 39). US Protestantism, which is of particular interest to this article, has primarily two organizational levels: the local church and the associational organization of the denomination. There is a functional division of labor between these two organizational levels: Whereas the congregation organizes the interaction rituals of local worship, the denomination organizes the overarching community of all believers (Kern et al. 2022). Ammerman defines congregations as "locally-situated, multi-generational, voluntary organizations of people who identify themselves as a distinct religious group and engage in a broad range of religious activities together." (Ammerman 2009: 562).

In contrast, denominations are "more and less bureaucratically organized, usually at the national level, and charged with supporting (and sometimes regulating) the groups and traditions that share a religious identity" (Ammerman 2016: 143). The denominational pluralism specific to the United States is often described as "competition". Unlike the European state church model, membership in denominations is historically voluntary. However, the various denominations often do not compete with each other at the local level of the congregations because the denominations are regionally unevenly distributed. For

example, whereas the Southern Baptist Convention dominates in Texas, the Evangelical Lutheran Association is strong in Minnesota.

A third type of collective organizational actors in the United States (next to congregations and denominations) is special-purpose groups (Ammerman 2016: 146). These are religious nonprofit organizations that provide social services and engage in missionary work, broadcasting, publishing, and much more (Scheitle 2010; Kern/Pruisken 2020). Unlike congregations or denominations, they are specialized in a specific goal or task.

3.3 Competing Governance Forms

In the US literature on church sociology, three fundamental "church structures" are described (Moberg 1962: 61–62): The Episcopal church structure is based on a hierarchical church order in which, for example, the bishop holds the highest authority over a local congregation. For instance, every Catholic parish worldwide is geographically defined (according to the parochial principle) and is affiliated with a diocese. The authority over the diocese rests with a local bishop, who in turn is under the authority of a higher unit, the Pope in the Catholic Church. Members are typically assigned to individual congregations near their place of residence according to the parochial principle. When moving to a new location, church members are required to register in a new parish.

In the Presbyterian church structure, an elected group of individuals known as "Presbyters" (from the Greek "presbyteros", meaning "elder") holds authority in a local congregation. The Presbyters of each congregation are, in turn, members of a broader assembly called the Synod. Because the Presbytery serves as an intermediary body between the congregation and the Synod, it can be "subject to pressure from above and below" (Moberg 1962: 94). Therefore, the Presbyterian church structure represents a hybrid form of the hierarchical Episcopal and polyarchic Congregationalist church structures.

The Congregationalist church structure advocates for the autonomy of local congregations. The responsibility for their respective ecclesiastical polity rests solely in their hands. Congregationalists may establish committees or offices for specific tasks, but the ultimate authority remains with the congregation members. The Congregationalist church structure is also referred to as "Baptist polity" because it is the prevalent church structure among Baptist churches. Membership in the congregation is based on personal choice and is exclusively

related to the local congregation. The dominant mode of negotiation is "polyarchy".

The three types of church organization describe the relationship between congregations and denominations in US denominationalism. However, they are not suitable for reflecting the profound transformation that the religious field in the United States has undergone in recent decades: The denomination's relevance as the predominant form of Protestant organization has considerably declined (Roozen/Hadaway 1993; Chaves 2017; Wuthnow 1988), Evangelicalism has become a mainstream Protestant movement, and – as a central feature of this development – the megachurch, as a new type of religious organization, is always spreading (Von der Ruhr 2020; Wollschleger/Porter 2011). Consequently, the diffusion of megachurches in the United States has led to a growing concentration of more and more believers in fewer congregations: "The biggest 1 percent of Protestant churches … contain approximately 20 percent of all the people, money, and staff" (Chaves 2017: 70). Beside their size – most studies label a congregation as a megachurch if it attracts 2000 attendees or more on Sundays – megachurches are characterized by two defining features: a relatively high degree of organizational autonomy and a strong orientation toward a religious market logic. "Organizational autonomy" means that their leadership exerts a high degree of control over the definition and attainment of the congregation's goals. The term "market logic" refers to a set of (more or less) latent background assumptions and beliefs that increasingly shape religious suppliers' and customers' behavioral expectations (Pruisken et al. 2022).

These developments are not unique to the religious field in the United States but are embedded in a global process in which patterns of marketization, economization, and commodification of noneconomic sectors are becoming prevalent worldwide (Martikainen/Gauthier 2013). Since the late 1980s, the New Public Management has become predominant in state-related sectors, such as science, education, and healthcare. With the model of the "governance equalizer", de Boer, Enders, and Schimank (2007) developed an analytical instrument with five dimensions that can be used to compare national higher education systems but has been used for the analysis of school systems as well. The instrument is designed to capture multiple governance forms at the same time: governmental regulation, democratic self-regulation, hierarchical self-regulation, stakeholder guidance and competition. All five dimensions can be more or less pronounced.

Based on the instrument of the governance equalizer, I distinguish six forms of governance that are prevalent in the field of religion in the United States: (1) denominational regulation, (2) democratic self-governance, (3) hierarchical self-governance, (4) stakeholder guidance, (5) competition, and (6) network governance. All three forms build more or less (but not solely) on binding agreements that result from mutual negotiations.

(1) The regulation of the congregation by the denomination can be compared to the regulation of universities through the state. In line with the model of the Episcopal church structure, the denomination regulates local congregations concerning finances, personnel, organization, programs, and doctrine. Regulation, as defined by Schimank (2007a: 241), means controlling behavior through conditional programs (Luhmann 1964). Therefore, the relationship between the denomination and the congregation is characterized by clear if-then rules governing various matters. Megachurches often adopt this governance form in the framework of the multisite model. The overarching main church, similar to the denomination, sets the rules, processes, and standards that the subordinate campus congregations must adhere to (Reed 2019).

(2) The democratic self-governance of congregations can be compared to the form of academic self-governance, which is characterized by professionals' involvement in decision-making processes in universities. The self-organization of Baptist congregations relies on the principle of the priesthood of all believers, which is often associated with Protestant Christianity. It emphasizes that all believers have direct access to God and are capable of interpreting and understanding the teachings of the faith. It suggests that individuals do not require an intermediary, such as a priest or clergy member, to connect with God or to mediate their relationship with him. The Congregationalist and Presbyterian church structures are marked by strong democratic self-governance. Members are involved in decision-making processes. Decisions are democratically voted on in elected committees or at a member meeting and are not decided hierarchically.

(3) Hierarchical self-governance refers to the management of single organizations (e.g., universities, schools, and congregations) that are controlled by strong leadership figures. Important decisions regarding personnel, finances, and programs as well as central religious beliefs are therefore in the hands of an individual pastor or a team of pastors. In many megachurches, democratic self-governance has been replaced by hierarchical self-governance (Pruisken/Coronel 2014; Kern/Pruisken/Schimank 2022). The relationship between be-

lievers and the senior pastor is often characterized by "charisma"[6] attributed to the senior pastor. However, hierarchical self-governance typically relies not only on charisma but also on an understanding of the pastor as a "leader" of the church similar to that position in the business world.

(4) The governance form of external control, often referred to as stakeholder guidance, is described by Schimank (2007a: 241) as a form of control through goal programs rather than conditional programs. Unlike denominational control, hierarchical instructions are not enforced from the top (the denomination) down to the local congregation but are negotiated in the form of agreements or recommendations. The interest of intermediate actors, that is, stakeholders, lies in enhancing the performance of the subordinate actor (such as the university or congregation). Here, certain special purpose organizations come into play, specifically religious counseling organizations. An example is church networks such as Acts 29[7] and Exponential.[8] These organizations advise congregations in achieving their goals. They focus on growth strategies and church planting and develop scientifically legitimated strategies for better leadership and community building. In addition, denominations increasingly use the stakeholder guidance mode. An example is the Baptist General Conference, which changed its name to "Converge" in 2015. It no longer sees itself as a denomination (as a regulating body) but as a movement that helps to start and strengthen churches.[9] Finally, megachurches that have institutionalized the multisite model can also use stakeholder guidance instead of direct forms of regulation.

(5) Competitive pressure as a form of coordination refers to the market, which consists of exchange as negotiation based on mutual observation and the use of potentials of influence, particularly time and money (Schimank 2007b: 242). Congregations (and denominations) exchange their "religious products" for resources. In this context, not only the amount of membership contributions counts as a resource; the number of worshipers can become an intrinsic value confirming the correctness of one's doctrine. Although the pressure for market formation in state-related sectors comes from the state, congregations in the United States often face real competitive pressure due to

6 In the sense of the concept of "charisma" in Weber's sociology of religion (Riesebrodt 1999).

7 Cf. https://www.acts29.com/about-us/.

8 Cf. https://exponential.org/.

9 Cf. https://www.converge.org/about.

actual scarcity of potential "customers" or a high density of churches (Homan 2024). A market consists of (a) a set of religious producers who observe each other mutually, (b) a set of consumers who compare these producers' offers, (c) a set of relations between these components, and (d) a comparative order that allows for categorization and evaluation of these offers (White 1981; Leifer 1985; Jansen 2013; Aspers/Beckert 2017).

(6) Unlike the higher education and science sectors, the religious sphere is additionally shaped by the mode of horizontal coordination as a sixth governance form ("network governance") (Martikainen 2013). Congregations join forces with other congregations, for example, by pooling resources to achieve collective goals. This leads to the formation of network or umbrella organizations that develop their own organizational structures. An example is the various interfaith activities that have emerged in the religious field in the past decades and that are specifically designed to build trust through networks (Körs/Nagel 2018).

With this categorization of governance forms in US Protestantism, nothing can yet be said about how common each form is and which ones might be losing influence. The question now arises of how these governance forms interact. New Public Management, and similarly the megachurch model, are characterized by a combination of hierarchical self-governance, stakeholder guidance, and competitive pressure (De Boer et al. 2007; Pruisken/Coronel 2014). The hierarchical regulation therefore shifts more strongly into the organizations. In this way, megachurches create an organizational power that enables the private social form of religion.

4. Discussion and outlook

From Thomas Luckmann's perspective, the concept of the social form encompasses the relationship among personality, social structure, and culture in a society. However, an analysis of the transformation of religion is only possible if all three levels are taken into account. In modern societies, the social form of private religion is the formative social structure of religion. Luckmann suggests that in the context of private religion, individuals in modern society experience a distinctive level of freedom in shaping their personal identity. This freedom, according to Luckmann, is akin to a consumer mindset, which extends beyond mere economic goods and encompasses the individual's engagement with the broader worldview. Luckmann's assumption was that religion

loses its obligatory hierarchical character. However, this only succeeds in an organizational society where organizations or other forms exist that provide these consumer choices. In the social form of private religion, religious organizations are increasingly only considered legitimate if they provide individual believers with choices (Kern et al. 2022; Pruisken et al. 2022). However, in Luckmann's framework, the meso level of organizations and interorganizational relations (the social structure) remains underdeveloped. As Freudenberg and Reuter demonstrate in the introduction to this volume, a wide variety of forms of institutionalization of religion has developed on the meso level of religious fields.

I developed my argument that the private social form of religion must be understood in the context of the emergence of the organizational society against the background of my research on megachurches and Protestant congregations in the United States (Pruisken/Coronel 2014; Pruisken et al. 2022; Kern et al. 2022). The focus was on governance forms that are based on mutual negotiations: denominational regulation, democratic self-governance, hierarchical self-governance, stakeholder guidance, competition, and network governance. The analysis shows that hierarchical forms of governance do not disappear. Therefore, the model of the megachurch is characterized by the fact that the organization is becoming more hierarchical internally. The leadership of megachurches increasingly aligns with standards issued by external organizations and consulting firms. At the same time, there is competition at the local level, especially when multiple megachurches compete in a city. This competition allows individual believers to choose between various congregations' offers.

For future research on social forms of religion, the elementary mechanisms of mutual observation and mutual influence are equally important. In particular, the increasing digitization of religion cannot be understood without these mechanisms. On digital platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, pastors, congregations, and other religious content providers can observe and adjust their actions to each other. The organized environment of these platforms also offers various opportunities for the emergence of influence potentials, such as the number of followers or violent outbreaks. Religious influencers can significantly increase the scope of their influence and thereby compete with established organized providers. The consequences of this development can only be understood if one understands religion, like other fields, as an "organized field" in which mechanisms of mutual observation, influence, and negotiation coexist and interact.

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