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Comparative Analysis of the Views of Rodney Stark and Bryan Wilson in the Context of Secularisation Paradigms

Sekülerleşme Paradigmaları Bağlamında Rodney Stark ve Bryan Wilson'ın Görüşlerinin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi

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Abstract

The phenomenon of secularisation has long been a subject of considerable interest among sociologists of religion. This process is intricately linked with modernization, which represents a fundamental dynamic driving societal change and reshaping various social institutions. According to some sociologists, religion, once a central institution, has begun to lose its influence and prominence as societies modernize. Numerous scholars, particularly sociologists have articulated this observation. Western sociologists have approached the study of secularisation through different paradigms, including “the old secularisation paradigm,” “the new secularisation paradigm,” and “the alternative (eclectic) secularisation paradigm,” the latter of which often focuses on non-Western contexts. For instance, Bryan Ronald Wilson (1926-2004), a prominent representative of the classical paradigm, has authored several influential works on new religious movements, such as *Sects and Society: Magic and the Millennium* (1973) and *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism* (1990). From a different perspective, Rodney Stark (1934-2022), a key figure in the new paradigm, has contributed extensively to the discourse on religion and secularisation through publications such as *The Triumph of Faith* (2015), *A Theory of Religion* (1987), *The Future of Religion* (1985), and various articles including “*Secularization, R.I.P.*” (1987) and “*Must All Religions Be Supernatural?*” (2015). Our study aims to examine, evaluate, and compare the perspectives of Bryan Wilson and Rodney Stark on secularisation using qualitative analysis and literature review methodologies. For the sake of comparison, we will focus on Stark's and Wilson's views on secularization and religion. In addition, the study aims to illuminate the evolution of secularization paradigms over time and show that although secularization is associated with modernity, it is perceived differently within the new paradigm. Furthermore, focusing on the perspectives of these two sociologists, we will analyse what role new religious movements and pluralistic understandings play in this context. On the other hand, Wilson argues that subjective religiosity remains high in Europe, suggesting that secularisation has significantly impacted traditional religious groups and contributed to the formation of new cults. Specifically, we will examine Wilson's assertion that, in modern society, churches have become “a post office,” visited only as needed, and that the rise of new religious movements reflects the diminished importance of religion in society. For Wilson, these movements are considered a secularized form of religion. According to Stark, secularisation has notably impacted traditional, low-intensity religious groups, it has not precluded the emergence of fervent cults and sects. Stark argues that although the influence of traditional religious institutions has diminished due to secularization, religious practices persist. We will explore Stark's views on religion and secularisation, including the evidence for secularisation and the proliferation of new religious movements in the modern world. In the final analysis, this paper claims that despite the decline in the influence of traditional religious institutions due to secularisation, religious practices have persisted in different forms or structures.

Keywords: Sociology of Religion, Secularisation Theories, Rodney Stark, Bryan Wilson, Modernity.

Öz

Sekülerleşme olgusu uzun zamandır din sosyologları arasında önemli bir ilgiye mazhar olmuştur. Bu süreç, toplumsal değişimi yönlendiren ve çeşitli toplumsal kurumları yeniden şekillendiren temel bir dinamiği temsil eden modernleşme ile iç içedir. Bazı sosyologlara göre, bir zamanlar merkezi bir kurum olan din, toplumlar modernleştikçe etkisini ve önemini kaybetmeye başlamıştır. Başta sosyologlar olmak üzere çok sayıda akademisyen bu gözlemi dile getirmiştir. Batılı sosyologlar sekülerleşme çalışmalarına “eski sekülerleşme paradigması”, “yeni sekülerleşme paradigması” ve “alternatif (eklektik) sekülerleşme paradigması” gibi farklı paradigmlarla yaklaşmışlardır; bunlardan sonuncusu genellikle Batı dışı bağlamlara odaklanmaktadır. Meselâ klasik paradigmanın önde gelen temsilcilerinden Bryan Ronald Wilson (1926-2004), yeni dinî hareketler üzerine *Sects and Society* (Mezhepler ve Toplum), *Magic and the Millennium* (1973) ve *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism* (1990) gibi birçok etkili eser kaleme almıştır: Buna karşılık, yeni paradigmanın kilit isimlerinden Rodney Stark (1934-2022), *The Triumph of Faith* (2015), *A Theory of Religion* (1987), *The Future of Religion* (1985) gibi kitapları ve “*Secularization, R.I.P.*” (1987) ve “*Must All Religions Be Supernatural?*” (2015) gibi çeşitli makaleler vasıtasıyla din ve sekülerleşme söylemine ciddi katkılarda bulunmuştur. Çalışmamız, Bryan Wilson ve Rodney Stark'ın sekülerleşme konusundaki bakış açılarını nitel analiz ve literatür taraması yöntemlerini kullanarak incelemeyi, değerlendirmeyi ve mukayese etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu mukayeseyi yapabilmek için Stark'la Wilson'ın sekülerleşme ve din konusundaki görüşlerine odaklanacağız. Bunun yanı sıra sekülerleşme paradigmalarının zaman içindeki evrimini aydınlatmak ve sekülerleşmenin modernite ile ilişkilendirilmesine rağmen yeni paradigma içinde farklı algılandığını göstermekte çalışmanın amaçları arasındadır. Ayrıca, bu iki sosyoloğun bakış açılarına odaklanarak, yeni dini hareketlerin ve çoğulcu anlayışların bu bağlamda nasıl bir rol oynadığını analiz edeceğiz. Wilson, Avrupa'da öznel dindarlığın hâlâ yüksek olduğunu savunarak sekülerleşmenin geleneksel dinî grupları önemli ölçüde etkilediğini ve yeni kültürlerin oluşumuna katkıda bulunduğunu öne sürmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Wilson'ın modern toplumda kiliselerin sadece ihtiyaç duyulduğunda ziyaret edilen bir “posthane” haline geldiği ve yeni dini hareketlerin yükselişinin dinin toplumdaki öneminin azaldığını yansıttığı iddiasını inceleyeceğiz. Zira Wilson'a göre bu hareketler dinin sekülerleşmiş bir biçimi olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Buna karşılık Stark'ın görüşü, sekülerleşmenin geleneksel, düşük yoğunluklu dinî grupları önemli ölçüde etkilemiş olsa da, ateşli tarikat ve mezheplerin ortaya çıkmasını engellemediğini vurgulamaktadır. Stark, sekülerleşme nedeniyle geleneksel dini kurumların etkisinin azalmasına rağmen, dini uygulamaların devam ettiğini savunmaktadır. Stark'ın din ve sekülerleşme hakkındaki görüşlerini, sekülerleşmenin delilleri ve modern dünyada yeni dinî hareketlerin çoğalması da dâhil olmak üzere inceleyeceğiz. Sonuç olarak bu makale, sekülerleşme sebebiyle geleneksel dinî kurumların etkisi azalmış olsa da dinî uygulamaların hiçbir zaman ortadan kalkmadığını, farklı biçim ve yapılar altında devam ettiğini iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Sosyolojisi, Sekülerleşme Teorileri, Rodney Stark, Bryan Wilson, Modernite.

Introduction

In sociological literature, secularisation is defined as “the decline in the importance of religious beliefs, practices, and institutions in modernizing societies”.¹ This concept is often used to interpret religious changes in societies outside the West. It carries both positive and negative connotations. According to Peter Berger (1929-2017), in Church circles, secularism is understood as a distancing from Christianity, whereas for anti-clericalists, it means liberation from religious control. Therefore, the definition and processes of secularisation vary depending on the religious systems.²

When the theories of secularisation have been analysed, it seems that the processes of secularisation experienced by societies have been explained as the combination of cultural conditions, structural differences, and certain historical events.³ In this context, many theories and paradigms about secularisation have been put forward until today. Among these, it is important to compare the views of Bryan Wilson (1926-2004), who defends the old paradigm, and Rodney Stark (1934-2022), one of the followers of the new paradigm, regarding their understanding of secularisation.

Although secularism originated in the West, it has become a global phenomenon, affecting almost every society. As one of the consequences of modernity, secularisation affects almost every society and thus makes non-Western practices and interpretations of secularisation important. In this field, “*Religion in Secular Society*”,⁴ “*Secularization*”⁵, “*The Debate over Secularization: Religion, Society and Faith*”⁶ and “*Secularization and Its Discontents*”⁷ by Bryan Wilson; “*A Theory of Religion*” and “*Secularization and Cult Formation in the Jazz Age*”⁸ by Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, Celalettin Çelik's *Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal*

¹ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: C.A. Watts, 1966).

² See for details. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Press, 1969) 106-125.

³ For further details Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (the United States: Doubleday, 1967); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Ramazan Akkır, “Sekülerleşme ve Göç İlişkisi: Suriyeli Mülteciler Örneği”, *Bilimname: Düşünce Platformu*, 38 (2019), 474.

⁴ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: C.A. Watts, 1966).

⁵ Bryan Wilson, “Secularization”, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, London: Collier Macmillan Publisher, 1987), 13/159-165.

⁶ Bryan Wilson, “The Debate Over Secularization: Religion, Society and Faith”, *Encounter* 45/4 (1975), 77-84.

⁷ Bryan Wilson, “Secularization and Its Discontents”, *Sociology of Religion A Reader*, ed. Susanne C. Monahan, William A. Mirola ve Michael O. Emerson (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), 204-213.

⁸ Rodney Stark,– William Bainbridge, “Secularization and Cult Formation in the Jazz Age”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 20/4 (1981), 360-373.

Sosyolojik Serüveni (The Theoretical Genealogical Adventure of Secularization) ⁹, Ömer Faruk Darende and Mehmet Ali Kirman's article *Wilson'a Göre Sekülerleşme (Secularization According to Wilson)* ¹⁰, Lütfü Ülver's *Peter L. Berger ve Rodney Stark'ın Din Kuramlarında Dinsel Çoğulculuk Anlayışı (Peter L. Berger and Rodney Stark's Theories of Religion)* ¹¹ and "*Rodney Stark'ın Sekülerleşme Teorisi*" (Rodney Stark's Secularization Theory) ¹² and "*Rodney Stark'ın Dinsel Hareketler Teorisi*" (Rodney Stark's Theory of Religious Movements) ¹³, As for books in this topic can be mentioned directly related to our study: *Sekülerleşme ve Din*¹⁴ by Mehmet Özay, *Seküler ve Dinsel: Aşman Sınırlar*¹⁵ by Nilüfer Göle, *Sekülerleşme Teorileri*¹⁶ by Volkan Ertit, *Varoluşsal Güvenlik ve Sekülerleşme: Modern Bir Teorinin Eleştirisi*¹⁷ by Ekber Şah Ahmedi.

Although Wilson and Stark's views on secularisation are evaluated separately in these studies, it is noteworthy that their opinions are not compared. Therefore, in our study, we will assess and compare the opinions of Stark and Wilson, who are the representatives of the new and old paradigms on secularisation theses, on the phenomenon of secularisation.

Traditional secularisation theory argues that modernization will reduce the influence of religion in society. However, it is observed that the influence of religion has not diminished in many societies, and even in some societies that are considered modern (for example, in the United States of America), there is a high rate of religiosity.¹⁸ This situation has caused the classical secularisation thesis to be questioned in academic circles. Therefore, with the emergence of new alternative approaches to the secularisation thesis, the direction

⁹ Celeleddin Çelik, "Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni", *Journal of Islamic Research*, 28/3 (2017), 209-223.

¹⁰ Ömer Faruk Darende-Mehmet Ali Kirman, "Wilson'a Göre Sekülerleşme", *Journal of Turkish Studies* 12/10 (2017), 81-100.

¹¹ Lütfü Ülver, *Peter L. Berger ve Rodney Stark'ın Din Kuramlarında Dinsel Çoğulculuk Anlayışı* (İzmir: Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2013).

¹² Lütfü Ülver, "Rodney Stark'ın Sekülerleşme Teorisi", *Rumeli İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7 (Nisan 2021), 179-195.

¹³ Lütfü Ülver, "Rodney Stark'ın Dinsel Hareketler Teorisi," *Toplum Bilimleri Dergisi* 15/30 (Haziran 2021), 187-206.

¹⁴ Mehmet Özay, *Sekülerleşme ve Din* (İstanbul: İz yayıncılık, 2007).

¹⁵ Nilüfer Göle, *Seküler ve Dinsel: Aşman Sınırlar*, trans. Erkal Ünal (İstanbul: Metis Yayıncılık,2012).

¹⁶ Volkan Ertit, *Sekülerleşme Teorileri* (Ankara: Liberte Yayınları, 2019).

¹⁷ Ekber Şah Ahmedi, *Varoluşsal Güvenlik ve Sekülerleşme: Modern Bir Teorinin Eleştirisi* (Ankara: Nobel Yayınları, 2023).

¹⁸ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 27-30; Peter Berger, "The Desecularization of The World: A Global Overview", *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter Berger. (MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 3.

of research has started to change. In addition, although the theory of secularisation in the history of religions has changed and is associated with modernity, new religious movements, and pluralism understandings have emerged due to the different perceptions of secularisation in the new paradigm. To reveal the reasons for this, it is necessary to compare the understanding of secularisation of two prominent sociologists of the old and new paradigms.

As for the methodology and limitations of the study, document analysis, which is a qualitative research method, will be used to compare and evaluate the views of two Western sociologists on the phenomenon of secularisation in their works. Considering that these two sociologists evaluate secularisation from a Western perspective, the reflections of secularisation in the Islamic world will not be discussed. The final analysis aims to contribute to the field by comparing the views of important representatives of two different secularisation paradigms from a broad perspective that a uniform secularization process cannot be mentioned and that this secularization also varies in different times and societies.

1. Secularisation and Related Paradigms

While secularisation is expressed in different languages, the specificity of the historical and cultural context can lead to ambiguity and mental complexity in the understanding and meaning of the concept. In Turkish the term “secularisation” acquires an independent meaning of its historical origins, especially when it is used to refer to phenomena such as a decline in religiosity and an increased interest in worldly pleasures and material power. Accordingly, the content of the ideological differences in Turkey also causes the concept of secularisation to take on different meanings. Moreover, the perception of secularisation is different in the West and Turkey. While secularisation in the West is evaluated as the decline in the influence of the Church on social institutions, in Turkey it is evaluated as the decline in the influence of religion within the scope of culture.¹⁹

Secularisation is evaluated as the tendency to move away from supernatural powers or sacredness.²⁰ In the social sense, this concept is understood as the decline in the influence of religion in daily life and its loss of importance with the dominance of science, reason,

¹⁹ Çelik, “Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni”, 210.

²⁰ For further details Jeffery K. Hadden, “Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory”, *Social Forces* 65 (1987). 589; Volkan Ertit, “Secularization: The Decline of the Supernatural Realm”, *Religions* 9/92 (2018), 2-18.

and logic.²¹ In this study, we define secularization “as the decreasing visibility of religious practices in an individual's daily life.” As Luckmann and Coşkun stress religion in modern society is more individual than institutional and more invisible than visible.²² Secularisation debates involve the idea that the role of religion in society is diminishing or changing, which means that different institutions are taking over the functions previously performed by religion. As mentioned above, three different paradigms of secularisation have been developed:

The old paradigm was defended by Peter Berger, Bryan Wilson and Steve Bruce (1954-....). They argued that religion would lose its importance in modern societies. *The New Paradigm*, on the other hand, argues that religion is indispensable in modern society and offers analyses that consider individual religiosity, supported by studies of the United States, led by Rodney Stark (1934-2022), William Sims Bainbridge (1940-....), Lourane Iannaccone (1954-...), Robert Finke (1956-...), David Alfred Martin (1929-2019), and Grace Davie (1946-...). As for *The Alternative (Eclectic) Paradigm*, it is led by Mark Chaves (1954,...), David Yamane (1962, ...), Jose Casanova (1951-...), Conrad Eugene Ostwalt (1959,...), and Karel Dobbelaere (1933-...), addresses the phenomenon of religion in the context of non-Western countries, taking into account the shortcomings of the old and new paradigms.²³

The theoretical divergences that became clearer after the 1980s became a turning point for secularisation and following this stage, the discipline of the sociology of religion began to reference three fundamental paradigms: classical, new, and alternative/eclectic. As mentioned above, it is noteworthy that Wilson, Wallis, and Bruce defended the classical paradigm, and Berger, who was initially included in this group, later abandoned this paradigm. These sociologists adopted positivist modernization as a theory and claimed that with the modernization process, the influence of religion on social institutions such as religious beliefs and practices, thought, law, economy, politics, and education began to disappear.²⁴ At the basis of the classical paradigm, it can be said that the Enlightenment in the West was followed by an orientation towards reason, science, and human beings

²¹ Mehmet Ali Kirman, “Sekülerleşme”, *Din Sosyolojisi Terimleri Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Rağbet Yayınları, 2011), 276-277.

²² Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (London: Routledge, 2022) ; Ali Coşkun, “Modernlik ve Dindarlık”, *Din Eğitim Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 17 (Aralık 2006), 61-62.

²³ Mehmet Özey, *Sekülerleşme ve Din* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2007), 138-143.

²⁴ Çelik, “Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni”, 220.

instead of an institutional understanding of religion. In the rational world based on reason and science, which forms the basis of this classical paradigm, religion's sphere of influence as well as its function and visibility will end due to modernization. Proponents of this paradigm try to support their approach by relying on empirical data showing that institutional religion in the West has experienced a general downward trend.²⁵

Sociologists and thinkers defending the “new paradigm” criticize the classical secularisation theory as “unproven, poorly intellectually grounded and ethnocentric”.²⁶ On the other hand, the discussions on secularisation in sociology correspond to an attempt to reconcile the existence of a perception of religiosity that is too preoccupied with the world and parallels it.

According to the alternative/eclectic paradigm, secularisation is “differentiation”; institutions that have an important place in the social sphere are moving away from the influence of religion. This paradigm, which emerged as an alternative to the two previous paradigms, approaches the concept of secularisation not primarily through the phenomenon of religion, but through the phenomenon of institutional religion, in other words, religious authority.²⁷ Sociologists and thinkers such as Yamane, Chaves, Casanova, and Ostwalt, who advocate this third paradigm, have stated that the new paradigm has failed to analyse the old paradigm well.

The starting point for these sociologists is their reinterpretation of the classical secularisation thesis based on the criticisms of the new paradigm against the old paradigm. The most important fact in the arguments of the eclectic paradigmists is that they do not understand the definition of secularisation in the discourse of the new paradigm; in other words, they argue that secularisation does not mean the disappearance of religion, but that religion tends towards an institutional secularisation with a particular emphasis on the

²⁵ For further details “Özay, *Sekülerleşme ve Din*, 160-162; Bryan Wilson, “Sekülerleşme”, trans. Ali Bayer, *Klasik ve Çağdaş Yaklaşımlar*, ed. Mehmet Ali Kirman- İhsan Çapcıoğlu (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2015), 9-24; Steve Bruce, “Sekülerleşme: “Sistematik Bir Betimleme”, trans. İhsan Çapcıoğlu, *Sekülerleşme Klasik ve Çağdaş Yaklaşımlar*, ed. Mehmet Ali Kirman-İhsan Çapcıoğlu (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2015), 44; Karel Dobbelaere, “Sekülerleşmenin Anlamı ve Kapsamı”, trans. Mehmet Süheyl Ünal, *Sekülerleşme: Klasik ve Çağdaş Yaklaşımlar*, ed. Mehmet Ali Kirman-İhsan Çapcıoğlu (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2015), 57-74; Abdurrahman Kurt, *İş Adamlarında Dindarlık ve Dünyevileşme* (Bursa: Emin Yayınları, 2009), 73; Halil Aydınalp, “Din ve Dünyevileşme: Kuzey Kıbrıs Tatlısı Örneği-II”, *Marmara University Journal of Theology Faculty* 53 (Aralık 2017), 100.

²⁶ Çelik, “Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni”, 220.

²⁷ Mark Chaves, “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority”, *Social Forces* 72/3 (March, 1994), 754.

word “authority”.²⁸ This alternative paradigm approaches the concept of secularisation through the phenomenon of institutional religion, in other words, religious authority, rather than the phenomenon of religion.²⁹ Thus, it starts by accepting the existence of secularisation. It differs from the old secularisation in that it includes religion in the structure of modern society. Moreover, it goes beyond the geographical boundaries of the first two paradigms by addressing both religious manifestations in Western societies and religious movements in non-Western societies.³⁰

The proponents of the new paradigm claimed that in the eyes of the proponents of the old paradigm, religions would disappear. According to those who adopt the eclectic view, this assessment of the proponents of the new paradigm regarding the members of the old paradigm is not accurate, since the proponents of the old paradigm did not claim that religion had disappeared, but only that it had regressed.

The proponents of the eclectic paradigm stressed that the advocates of the new paradigm exaggerated the prominence of religion in modern society, focused only on secularisation in the United States, while neglecting Europe, concentrated primarily on the individual level, and overlooked the institutional dimension.³¹ As a result, the differences between the old and new systems of thought on secularism have emerged about the relationship between modernity and postmodernity. Modernity, following the emergence of positivism, predicted that religion would disappear over time and lose its function in mental and social processes in the evolutionary development process of human beings. However, postmodernism questioned this positivist perspective and created a ground where religion could regain importance. Changing the traditional perception of religiosity, it opened more space for new forms of religiosity and individual religious practices.³² According to Habermas' theory of post-secular society, modern societies have not completely lost the importance of religion in social life; on the contrary, religion has re-

²⁸ Özey, *Sekülerleşme ve Din*, 141.

²⁹ Mark Chaves, “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority”, *Social Forces* 72/3 (1994), 754.

³⁰ Özey, *Sekülerleşme ve Din*, 142.

³¹ Niyazi Akyüz - İhsan Çapcıoğlu, *Ana Başlıklarıyla Din Sosyolojisi* (Ankara: Grafiker Yayıncılık, 2012), 414-415; Feyza Nur Alparşlan Özkan, *Sekülerleşmede Yeni Dinî Boyutlar: Dindarların Sekülerleşme Süreci* (Sakarya: Sakarya University, Social Sciences Institution, Master Thesis, 2019), 26.

³² Çelik, “Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni”, 221.

entered the public sphere in new forms and roles.³³

2. Classical Paradigm Representative Bryan Ronald Wilson's Views on Religion and Secularisation

2.1. Religion and Secularisation

According to Wilson, religion does not disappear in parallel with secularisation, but there is a transformation in the way people live and experience their beliefs. In fact, due to modernization and scientific developments, people need rational explanations to defend their religious beliefs. Therefore, Wilson points out the importance of rationalizing religious beliefs.³⁴ By emphasizing the ability of religious beliefs to adapt to changing social conditions, it can be stated that Wilson challenges other interpretations of secularisation. According to Wilson, secularisation is the process by which religious ideas, practices, and institutions lose their social significance.³⁵ He argues that although secularisation in the public sphere does not signal the end of religion in the private sphere, religious individuals now have to compete with the search for meaning in other private spheres.³⁶ While the influence of the church is declining, the increase in congregational groups is considered an indicator of secularisation by Bruce and other representatives of the classical approach such as Wallis (1945-1990) and Wilson.³⁷

According to Wilson, the process of secularisation shows that religion ceases to be important in the functioning of the social system.³⁸ He also claimed that secularisation is a long process and that many functions of religion have been forgotten or changed in this process.³⁹ In addition, Wilson, as a precursor of the classical secularisation theory, stated in his book *Religion in Secular Society* published in 1966 that the influence of religion in

³³ Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14/1 (2006), 1-25; Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society", *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 25/4 (2008), 17-29.

³⁴ Ali Bayer, "Sekülerleşme ve Din İlişkisi: Kuramsal Bir Yaklaşım", *KSU Journal of Theology Faculty* 16 (2010), 156.

³⁵ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: C.A. Watts, 1966), 14; Alan Alridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 73.

³⁶ Rob Warner, *Secularization and Its Discontents* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 37; See more details. Michael Rotolo, Gregory A. Smith and Jonathan Evans, "8 in 10 Americans Say Religion is Losing Influence in Public Life", *Pew Research Center* (15 March 2024), 19.

³⁷ Özey, *Sekülerleşme ve Din*, 138.

³⁸ *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology*, ed. Linda Woodhead-Paul Heelas (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 313; Karel Dobbelaere, "Sekülerleşme Kavramı: Bütüncül Bir Perspektife Doğru", trans. Cemal Özel, *Journal of Islamic Research* 29/3 (2018), 670.

³⁹ Roberto Cipriani, *Din Sosyolojisi: Tarih ve Teoriler*, ed. Ali Coşkun, trans. group (İstanbul: Rağbet Yayınları: 2011), 254.

Western societies was declining.⁴⁰ To sum up, according to Wilson, there has been a decrease in the social functions of religion as society has evolved from a community to a larger society. In this transformation process, difficulties arose in transferring the sense of mutual responsibility and shared moral values that existed in the community.⁴¹

2.2. Evidence of Secularisation

While claiming that secularisation has taken place, Wilson relied on evidence such as the reduction of resources, the existence of religious institutions, and the shift of the traditional functions, and activities of religion to the secular sphere. Furthermore, the decrease in the time, energy, and resources, people spend on non-religious areas, prefer mostly scientific and rational thinking with religious experiences, and abandon mythological explanations of natural and social events. Instead of emotional evaluations, they incline intellectual and realistic evaluations as well as scientific explanations.⁴²

Wilson argues that due to the rise in empirical and realist approaches, pragmatic attitudes and causal thinking have gained popularity in everyday life, indicating a decline in religious consciousness.⁴³ Another evidence for a decline in the demand for religious institutions and rituals is that resources such as work, wealth, energy, time, and talent are now channelled to worldly rather than supernatural purposes. In addition, other signs that reinforce the idea of increasing secularisation in society include the decline in the number of religious institutions and religious officials, the lower social status and salaries of religious officials compared to other professional groups, the state control over various institutions, the de-prioritization of religion in the interpretation of historical and cosmic events, the separation of religious and political institutions, and the loss of power by religious institutions.⁴⁴

Wilson argues that the standards and values that dominate a secular society will influence religious institutions and practices in that society and that this influence will continue to increase. As a natural consequence of the use of scientific and technical criteria

⁴⁰ Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, 11.

⁴¹ Warner, *Secularization and Its Discontents*, 3.

⁴² Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 187; Hafize Şule Albayrak, *Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde Din-Devlet İlişkileri: Sosyolojik Bir Analiz* (İstanbul: Marmara University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2012), 15.

⁴³ Wilson, "Sekülerleşme", 12-13.

⁴⁴ Erol Erkan, "Sekülerleşme Teorileri Perspektifinden Türkiye'de Dindarlık", *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences* 20/4 (2021), 1560-1561; Wilson, "Sekülerleşme", 14, 16.

in the evaluation of social problems, religious institutions are also affected by this process. Thus, the difference between the sacred and the secular is diminishing in representing religion, the language used in rituals is being changed by taking on a more secular form, the process of organization is being rationalized, universal values play a decisive role, and religious activities are being adapted to secular understandings and preferences.⁴⁵ Wilson, as one of the leading proponents of secularisation theory, also states that the church has begun to be perceived as a post office in the process of modernization. According to Wilson, the church has become an institution like a post office,⁴⁶ which is visited only when needed in modern society.

Wilson also predicts that firstly religious institutions, then religious practices, and finally the social meaning of religious consciousness will be lost under the influence of modernization.⁴⁷ Issues such as the perspective from which religion is viewed and the interpretation of religion are the main variables in evaluating religion from a sociological perspective. Wilson and other like-minded sociologists⁴⁸, who adopt the understanding that religion is a social institution, consider the decline in social activities such as attending places of worship or participating in religious institutions as a criterion of the emergence of modernity and argue that modernity causes the weakening of religion.⁴⁹

Studies carried out by prominent researchers such as Acquaviva (1927-2015), Berger, Luckmann (1927-2016), Martin, and Wilson show that after the 1960s, secularisation has largely taken place at the individual level in Europe. These studies reveal that the power of disposition regarding the beliefs, worship, and moral principles of individuals is no longer in the hands of religious authorities. At the same time, these are among the main indicators of individual secularisation. According to the aforementioned researchers, although this situation shows that institutional religious authorities have lost their power to control individual religiosity, it does not mean that there is a decrease in individuals' worship, and

⁴⁵ Wilson, "Sekülerleşme",14; Erkan, "Sekülerleşme Teorileri Perspektifinden Türkiye'de Dindarlık",1561.

⁴⁶ For more information see. Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformation of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 19-21; Ali Köse, "Modernleşme-Sekülerleşme İlişkisi Üzerine Yeni Paradigmalar", *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi* 24 (2001), 157; Ali Köse, "XXI. Yüzyıl Türkiye'sinde Gelenekle Modernite Arasında Din Algıları ve Dindarlık Formları: Sosyolojik Bir Bakış", *Marmara University Journal of Theology Faculty* 49/49 (Aralık 2015), 21-22.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 149.

⁴⁸ Such as Peter Berger, David Martin, and Rodney Stark.

⁴⁹ Köse, "Modernleşme-Sekülerleşme İlişkisi Üzerine Yeni Paradigmalar",163.

fulfilment of their religious duties or that religion has collapsed.⁵⁰

A survey carried out in the USA DC Colombia by telephone interview shows that people who describe themselves as unreligious and unspiritual religious people doubled in 24 years.⁵¹ The findings are derived from telephone interviews conducted between July 3-27, 2023, with a randomly selected sample of 1,015 adults aged 18 and over residing across all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

Question: “Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your beliefs -- you are religious, you are spiritual but not religious, or you are neither?”

	Religious	Spiritual but not religious	Neither	Both (volunteered response)	No opinion
2023 Jul 3-27	% 47	% 33	% 18	% 2	% 1
2002 Jan 11-14	% 50	% 33	% 11	% 4	% 2
1999 Dec 9-12	% 54	% 30	% 9	% 6	% 1

The findings from a July 2023 Gallup poll, which revisited questions from 1999 and 2002, reveal that 82% of Americans now subscribe to some form of spiritual belief. This marks a decrease from 90% in 1999 and 87% in 2002. The trend of fewer Americans identifying as religious aligns with broader patterns observed in other Gallup surveys over the past 20 years.⁵²

2.3. Decline in Church Attendance

Wilson saw the decline in church attendance as evidence of secularisation. However, in analysing this issue, he evaluated church attendance separately in Europe and the United States. While he considered the decline in church attendance in Europe as a clear sign of secularisation, he interpreted the increase in church attendance in the USA as a different secularisation process. Wilson stated that although there is an increase in church attendance, the US society lives religion superficially; religion is not among the basic values of their culture, and therefore, the churches are losing their religious characteristics day by day by starting to secularise from within.⁵³ The following statistic supports Wilson’s opinions on the decline in church attendance. For example, in France, a 2021 survey

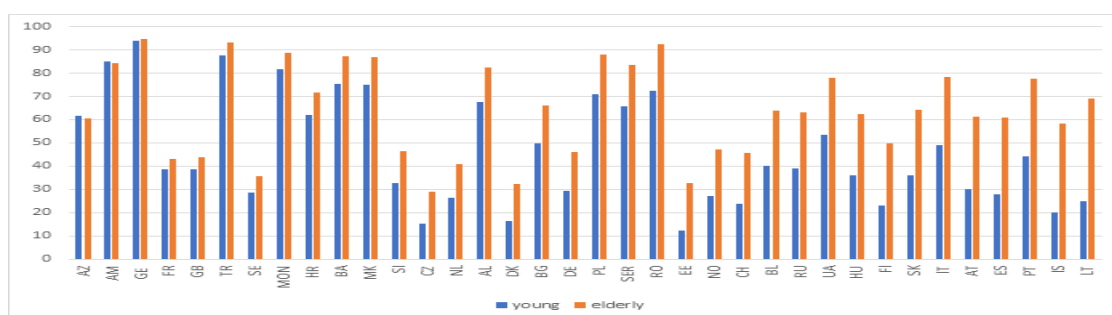
⁵⁰ Çelik, “Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni”, 217.

⁵¹ Gallup News Service Gallup Poll Social Series: Consumption Habits -- Final Topline -- Timberline: 937614, 2023. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/511133/identify-religious-spiritual.aspx> Date of access: 10 August 2024.

⁵² Jeffrey M. Jones, “In U.S., 47% Identify as Religious, 33% as Spiritual,” 2023. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/511133/identify-religious-spiritual.aspx> Date of access: 10 August 2024.

⁵³ Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, 75.

revealed that more than 50% of the population either identify as atheists or view Christianity as irrelevant. The proportion of people identifying as Catholic dropped from 81% in 1986 to 47% in 2020, while those with no religious affiliation increased from 16% to 40%. In the Netherlands during the 1970s, 39% of people identified as Catholic, but this figure decreased to 23% by the mid-2010s. Additionally, the number of Calvinists and Methodists also saw a significant reduction during this period. By 2020 in Italy, approximately 12 million people attended religious services weekly, which is about 6 million fewer than a decade earlier.⁵⁴ Moreover, the European Values Study (EVS) provides longitudinal data showing a trend of declining religious belief and practice across Europe, supporting Wilson’s view of secularisation.



The graph taken from *Atlas of European Values*⁵⁵ illustrates a clear generational divide in the value placed on religion: older individuals generally regard it as more significant, whereas younger people tend to view it as less important. The notable exception is in Azerbaijan (AZ), Armenia (AM), and Georgia (GE), where religious importance is relatively consistent across age groups. This disparity might indicate a broader trend toward secularism among younger generations, while the older generation’s stronger religious commitment may stem from their life experiences, family traditions, and adherence to more traditional social norms.⁵⁶ As a different example, the following table⁵⁷ shows “Religious Self-Identification of the U.S. Adult Population in 1990, 2001, 2008”.

	1990		2001		2008	
	Estimated Number of People	%	Estimated Number of People	%	Estimated Number of People	%
Catholic	46,004,000	26.2	50,873,000	24.5	57,199,000	25.1

⁵⁴ <https://www.premierchristianity.com/news-analysis/explained-is-church-attendance-falling-in-europe/15869.article>

⁵⁵ <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/about-evs/research-topics/religion/>

⁵⁶ Table quoted from <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/about-evs/research-topics/religion/>

⁵⁷ Barry A. Kosmin-Ariela Keysar, “American Religious Identification Survey: Summary Report” (2008), 3.

Other Christian	105,221,000	60.0	108,641,000	52.2	116,203,000	50.9
Total Christians	151,225,000	86.2	159,514,000	76.7	173,402,000	76.0
Other Religions	5,853,000	3.3	7,740,000	3.7	8,796,000	3.9
Nones	14,331,000	8.2	29,481,000	14.1	34,169,000	15.0
DK/Refused	4,031,000	2.3	11,246,000	5.4	11,815,000	5.2
Total	175,440,000	100.0	207,983,000	100.0	228,182,000	100.0

According to the results of the survey, the groups identified as non-theist and those with no religious affiliation, collectively termed “Nones,” have increased by nearly 20 million adults since 1990, expanding from 8.2% to 15.0% of the overall population. When factoring in Americans who are uncertain about their religious identification (0.9%) or who decline to respond to the key survey question (4.1%)—both of which generally exhibit social profiles and beliefs similar to the “Nones”—it becomes evident that by 2008, one in five adults did not identify with any religion, a marked increase from one in ten in 1990.

2.4. The Rise of Rationalism Devaluation of Religious Interpretations

Bryan Wilson argues that the widespread secularisation of a society does not prevent some people from maintaining religious beliefs and practices. He acknowledges that religion is not as influential in social institutions, behaviour, and consciousness as it used to be; however, the loss of the importance of religion on a social scale does not necessarily mean that individuals will eliminate their religiosity in the private sphere.⁵⁸ In Wilson's theory, rationalism has an important place in the independent functioning of scientific knowledge and methods. Wilson posits that the interpretation of the world from a religious perspective can be attributed to the emergence of rationalism. Rationalism even put the great religions in a difficult situation and forced them to make many concessions.⁵⁹

2.5. Cults or the Spread of New Religions in the Modern World

Sociologists such as Wilson and Fenn (1945-2003) have argued that the prevalence of cults or new religions in the modern world is an indicator of the secularisation process.⁶⁰ Wilson claimed that exotic religions which include both indigenous and imported beliefs have emerged as a consequence of the modern world. According to Wilson, secularisation has affected a large part of society.⁶¹ So Wilson worries about the consequences of

⁵⁸ Malcolm Hamilton, “Secularization”, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1995), 169; Steve Bruce, *Religion and Modernization* (The United States: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

⁵⁹ Wilson, “Secularization and Its Discontents”, 212.

⁶⁰ Wilson, “The Debate Over Secularization: Religion, Society and Faith”, 81-82.

⁶¹ See more information. Wilson, “The Debate Over Secularization: Religion, Society and Faith”, 77-84.

secularisation, such as the breakdown of social unity and the disregard for religion. Moreover, he accepts the emergence of new religious movements as an indication of the shaking of the importance given to religion in society and claims that these movements are a secularised version of religion.⁶² He creates a sociological typology⁶³ by analysing new religious movements by dividing them into seven categories which are transformational, revolutionary, introverted, gnostic-manipulationist, thaumaturgical, reformist, and utopian.

On the other hand, Wilson's view was that religious groups should be the subject of analysis in order to identify cults. For this reason, he conducted an academic study on a religious group called *Bruderhof* and put forward his views on why it could not be a cult based on the principles⁶⁴ adopted by this religious group. When we evaluate his opinions about secularisation, it can be stated that the concept of secularisation is defined by some sociologists such as Wilson, Wallis, and Bruce as the loss of the social power of religion in social institutions and subsystems such as family, education, economy, and law. This definition implies that secularisation means the loss of institutional religious authority over other subsystems.⁶⁵ As a result, religion has moved away from being the basic institution and system itself in society and has become equivalent to other social institutions. The sociologists mentioned above have emphasized that, with secularisation, religious symbols have lost their meaning, vitality, and attractiveness, people's participation rates in worship have decreased and the importance of the sacred has decreased.⁶⁶ According to social scientists, secularisation has an unstoppable power.⁶⁷

3. Rodney Stark's Views on Religion, Modernity and Secularisation

3.1. Religion

Stark's understanding of religion differs from that of secularisation theorists. From

⁶² Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, 138.

⁶³ Bryan R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development", *American Sociological Review*, *The Sociology of Religion*, ed. Steve Bruce (Great Britain: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995) 24-26.; See more information Bryan R. Wilson, "A Typology of Sects", *Sociology of Religion*, ed. Roland Robertson (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 364-381; Nuri Tınaz, "A Social Analysis of Religious Organisations: The Cases of Church, Sect, Denomination, Cult and New Religious Movements (NRMs) and Their Typologies", *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 13 (2005), 75-76.

⁶⁴ The Bruderhof group takes a positive view of goals, values and life against violence and in defense of life.

⁶⁵ *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* ed. Linda Woodhead, Paul Heelas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 327.

⁶⁶ Wilson, "Sekülerleşme", 12-13; Çelik, "Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni", 218.

⁶⁷ Hüsnü Ezber Bodur, "Sekülerleşme Teorileri Çerçevesinde Din ve Sosyal Değişme", *Sekülerleşme ve Dinî Canlanma* (Ankara: Türkiye Dinler Tarihi Derneği, 2008), 34.

his point of view, the main source of most otherworldly rewards is belief in the supernatural. Therefore, only God can offer an eternally happy life that compensates for all the troubles and sufferings experienced in this world because only God has the power to fulfil the promise of eternal life. In other words, only God can promise us eternal life. One of the most important reasons for the maintenance of belief in the supernatural may be the effort of individuals to combat the anxieties caused by death. As long as this situation continues, people's supernatural-based beliefs will prevail over secular thinking systems.⁶⁸

However, Stark states that there are continuous changes in social systems, and as a result of this situation, he accepts that religions may become increasingly inadequate in responding to people's needs. As William Swatos (1946-2020) and Kevin J. Christiano emphasize, Stark and Bainbridge prefer to adopt a cyclical approach, reminiscent of Pitirim Sorokin's theory of socio-cultural development,⁶⁹ rather than "linear" theories when assessing the status of religion in the modern world.⁷⁰ In this regard, Stark mentions two concepts, religious revival, and religious innovation, to compensate for secularisation, which he sees as a self-limiting process.⁷¹

According to Stark, a segment of society considers religion only in the context of Judaism or Christianity and regards the institutional structures connected to these religions. This segment which claims that religion will disappear fails to realize that there are some changes and transformations in the practices of supernatural beliefs with modernization. Stark thinks that, over time, people may lose interest in religious groups, particularly liberal religious movements, and even institutions within the Judeo-Christian tradition may vanish; however, he contends that human attachment to the supernatural will continue. Moreover, Stark claims that even in regions where traditional religions⁷² have lost their influence, there are signs that people have continued their relationship with the

⁶⁸ Stark-Bainbridge, "Secularization and Cult Formation in the Jazz Age", 361; Ülver, "Rodney Stark'ın Sekülerleşme Teorisi",184.

⁶⁹ See for more information. Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Sociocultural Causality, Space, Time* (USA: Duke University Press,1943), 25-26-27; Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility* (United States of America: Free Press, 1964), 549-550.

⁷⁰ William H. Swatos, - Kevin J. Christiano, "Sekülerleşme Teorisi: Bir Kavramın Serüveni", *Sekülerizm Sorgulanıyor: 21. Yüzyılda Din'in Geleceği*, haz. Ali Köse, (İstanbul: Ufuk Kitapları 2002), 106.

⁷¹ Stark-Bainbridge, "Secularization and Cult Formation in the Jazz Age", 362.

⁷² Religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Stark calls nontraditional and notformed religious formations which don' split and schisim as cults or new religions. See Ülver, "Rodney Stark'ın Dinsel Hareketler Teorisi",195.

supernatural in new ways.⁷³ According to Stark, if a religion is de-mythologized and loses its supernatural features, it cannot recapture the deep levels of devotion it had in the past, because the *raison d'être* of religion is to provide satisfactory answers to questions of ultimate meaning, but the loss of their supernatural features makes this impossible.⁷⁴

When Stark's theory of religion is compared with the nature of the secularisation theory, which we will discuss later, it is seen that the theory of religion decisively challenges secularisation. According to him, secularisation is not only an inevitable consequence of modernization but also a partial distancing from religion and the loss of members of some religious groups. On the other hand, Stark posits the constant search for meaning and the desire for immortality inherent in human nature gives rise to a need for the development of a supernatural belief system.⁷⁵ He argues that “the pluralism that occurs as a result of the modernization process, contrary to classical secularisation theorists, does not lead to secularisation, but to religious vitality by increasing competition in the “religious market”. In other words, pluralism, which is accepted as one of the accelerators of the secularisation process by classical theorists, actually plays a fundamental role in the formation of religious demand in society by increasing religious competition in Stark's opinion. This is because pluralism creates an environment of competition, which in turn necessitates the renewal and specialization of religious groups.”⁷⁶ Thus, Stark emphasizes that the impact of modernization may not lead to the abandonment of religious beliefs but rather to adaptation among religious groups and to more original methods of addressing the needs of those groups.⁷⁷ It is especially noteworthy that Stark and William Bainbridge argue that a future without religion is just an illusion,⁷⁸ and in the struggle between

⁷³ Ülver, “Rodney Stark'ın Sekülerleşme Teorisi”, 185.

⁷⁴ Rodney Stark, “Must All Religions Be Supernatural?”, *The Social Impact of New Religious Movements*, ed. Bryan Wilson (New York: Rose of Sharon Press, 1981), 163-164; See more information Rodney Stark, - William Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 434; Rodney Stark -William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1987), 42-43; See more information Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Faith* (The United States: ISI books, 2015), 205-206.

⁷⁵ Ülver, *Peter L. Berger ve Rodney Stark'ın Din Kuramlarında Dinsel Çoğulculuk Anlayışı*, 362.

⁷⁶ Akbarshah Ahmadi, *Bir Sekülerleşme Teorisi Olarak Varoluşsal Güvenlik Teorisinin Analizi* (Bursa: Uludağ University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD thesis, 2016), 48.

⁷⁷ Fatih Varol, “Dini Piyasalar Teorisi: Eleştirel Bir Değerlendirme, *Ankara University Journal of Theology Faculty* 58/2 (2017), 122.

⁷⁸ Stark - Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, 1.

secularisation and religion, secularisation will be defeated not religion.⁷⁹ Consequently, it can be stated that researchers such as Stark, Swatos, and Christiano focus on the significant decline in individual religiosity observed in society rather than secularisation.⁸⁰

3.2. Modernity

Stark argued that the thesis of the incompatibility of modernity with religion is not accurate. In addition to Stark, prominent American sociologists such as Peter Berger, Daniel Bell (1919-2011), and Jeffrey Hadden (1937-2003) have defended a new paradigm that challenges the thesis that modernity is incompatible with religion. According to them, the decline in church attendance cannot be the only measure of secularisation. The fact that people do not attend temples or feel no institutional attachment to religion does not prevent them from maintaining their belief in the existence of the soul and the supernatural (God).⁸¹

Proponents of the new paradigm, such as Stark, Bainbridge, Iannoccone, Finke, and Davie, claim that secularisation is an inevitable historical process with modernization. These sociologists have stated that secularisation does not occur in every society confronted with modernity. They also emphasized that, as a result of secularisation, new religious communities brought about religious renewal and an increase in individual religiosity instead of institutional religion.⁸²

The new paradigm pioneered by the aforementioned social scientists is based on the criticism of the classical paradigm. The new paradigm emphasizes that religion will not disappear with modernization, on the contrary, the importance of religion will increase, and it will be revived in every field. This paradigm, which argues that the legitimizing and comforting functions of religion continue, is based on the increase in new religious movements,⁸³ the widespread religious fundamentalism debates, the greater inclusion of religion in political discourses, and the fact that religions still play a role in the human

⁷⁹ Daniel Bell, "Religion in the Sixties", *Social Research* 38/3 (1971), 447-497; Daniel Bell, *The Winding Passage* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: ABT. 1980).

⁸⁰ Çelik, "Sekülerleşmenin Kuramsal Sosyolojik Serüveni", 218.

⁸¹ Köse, "XXI. Yüzyıl Türkiye'sinde Gelenekle Modernite Arasında Din Algıları ve Dindarlık Formları: Sosyolojik Bir Bakış", 16.

⁸² Özey, *Sekülerleşme ve Din*, 187-188.

⁸³ Dominique Macneill, "Extending the Work of Halbwachs: Danièle Hervieu- Léger's Analysis of Contemporary Religion", *Durkheimian Studies*, 4 (1998), 74-75.

search for ultimate meaning.⁸⁴

3.3. Secularisation

In the following, Stark's views on this issue will be evaluated under headings.

3.3.1. Subjective Religiosity is Still High in Europe

Stark challenges sociologists' claims and states that the rate of subjective religiosity is still high in Europe. Therefore, he argues that it is illogical to define people who believe in God but do not fulfil their religious practices and the countries they live in as secular societies or countries.⁸⁵ While he argues that the claims that Europe has secularised are baseless, he supports this view by referring to historians and emphasizing that church attendance and religious participation in Northern and Western Europe was not high even in the Middle Ages. In conclusion, Stark refuses classical secularisation theory which claims to be an incompatibility between modernization and religion, and the source of this incompatibility is religion itself. Whereas what Stark opposes are claims, supported by evidence, that there was an age of faith and religiosity in the past relative to the present.⁸⁶

On the other hand, Stark and Bainbridge do not generally regard secularisation as a feature of modern society but as a continuous phenomenon that can be observed in any period of history.⁸⁷ For this reason, both of them reject the "Golden Age" approach and argue that secularisation cannot be compressed into a specific time.⁸⁸ There is a misperception that Europe was more religious in the past; nevertheless, this illusion depending on modernity has caused declining in the rate of religious participation in churches and does not reflect reality. Because it has been seen that this perception has no historical basis. Although the rate of religious participation is low in most countries today, it is not an accurate determination to claim that its only reason is modernization. Hence, Stark considers the assumptions of sociologists that Europe has moved away from religiosity as a serious mistake, even though they do not have the necessary data and historical background on this issue. Because, as Andrew Greeley says, "Europe hasn't given

⁸⁴ Halil Aydınalp, "Din ve Dünyevîleşme: Kuzey Kıbrıs Tatlısu Örneği-II", *Marmara University Journal of Theology Faculty*, 53 (Aralık 2017), 100-101.

⁸⁵ Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.", *Sociology of Religion*, 60/3 (1999), 254.

⁸⁶ Warner, *Secularization and Its Discontents*, 78.

⁸⁷ Bruce, *Religion and Modernization*, 26.

⁸⁸ Erkan, "Sekülerleşme Teorileri Perspektifinden Türkiye'de Dindarlık", 1560.

up Christianity, since a Christian Europe never existed in history.”⁸⁹

Western intellectuals⁹⁰ have often interpreted the secularisation of religion as its death when it is identified with certain institutions, as the death of religion. However, the history of religion is not only a history of decline but also a history of rebirths and developments. For this reason, it can be stated that although the source of religion changes over time, the religiosity manifested in societies, albeit relatively, is continuous.⁹¹

3.3.2. Basic Assumptions of Secularisation Theory

Though Stark summarises the basic assumptions of secularisation theory put forward by Wallace and others in five points, he criticizes them. Firstly, it is a basic assumption of the secularisation theory that the process of modernization will bring about an increase in industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization, and, as a result, a decrease in religiosity in societies. According to this theory, secularisation is the inevitable result of modernization and will be experienced all over the world due to its universal character. Secondly, the secularisation theory claims that secularisation will not only lead to an institutional separation between the Church and the state but that religious belief and individual religiosity will gradually disappear. Thirdly, the secularisation theory claims that the influence of religious worldviews in our lives will come to an end as science becomes more active in social life, and religious dogmas will gradually disappear from our lives. Fourthly, this theory claims that secularisation, which is the result of modernization, is an irreversible process. The last assumption argues that “since the process of secularisation is a universal phenomenon, as Wallace mentioned,⁹² inevitably, not only the God of Christianity but also the belief in supernatural powers will disappear.”⁹³

As for Stark, he presents his views on this subject by criticizing the assumptions of the secularisation theory. As mentioned above, the dramatic decline in church attendance in Europe is one of the sociological evidence used by the proponents of the secularisation theory for the decline of religion. However, according to Stark, this decline in the demand for religious institutions cannot be considered a sign of unbelief. Although proponents of

⁸⁹ Stark, “Secularization, R.I.P.”, 260; quot. from Andrew Greeley, *Religion as Poetry* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 63.

⁹⁰ Such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Max Weber.

⁹¹ Stark - Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, 3.

⁹² Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966), 264-265.

⁹³ Stark, “Secularization, R.I.P.”, 251-253.

secularisation theory claim that church attendance has declined recently, Stark emphasizes that it has never been high in any period of history.⁹⁴

Moreover, Stark finds the secularisation theory contrary to reality. However, in the secularisation theory defended by European sociologists⁹⁵, the analyses of the scale of religiosity provide some findings that religiosity has decreased in Europe. However, when the statistics on religiosity in Europe are analyzed, it is seen that the decline in the rate of church attendance has occurred for a long time. Stark argues that attendance at church services in Northern and Western Europe was low even before modernization. For this reason, he rejects the claim of the proponents of secularisation that the importance of religion declines.⁹⁶ Because studies on this subject do not support the thesis that the past was more religious, for this reason, Stark, in his article "*Secularization R.I.P.*", emphasizes that the concept of a "pious past" is only nostalgia. Indeed, to be specific to Europe, leading historians of medieval religion agree that there was no longer an "age of faith" throughout history.⁹⁷ Stark cites the 11th-century English monk William of Malmesburg's complaint that nobles rarely went to churches and that even the most pious people preferred to stay in their beds at home⁹⁸ rather than attend the morning service in the churches. Thus, it can be stressed that Stark argues that there was no negative change in the rate of religiosity in Europe and that Europe, which had not been religious before, continued to be so.

3.3.3. The Effects of Secularisation on Traditional Religious Groups and Cult Formation

According to Stark, although it is an undeniable fact that the visibility of religion in society has decreased, it does not mean that religion has completely disappeared from society as a result of secularisation, but that it has undergone a transformation. Stark argues that secularisation weakens particular religious organizations but has not prevented the

⁹⁴ Stark, "*Secularization, R.I.P.*", 260.

⁹⁵ Such as Bryan Wilson, Peter Berger, David Martin, Steve Bruce, and Grace Davie.

⁹⁶ Ülver, "*Rodney Stark'ın Sekülerleşme Teorisi*", 182.

⁹⁷ Stark, "*Secularization, R.I.P.*", 255. In my view, this can be considered on the scale of Christianity. However, considering the Crusades that lasted for 200 years, it can be stated that religious motives were more prominent in some periods, although it cannot be considered a complete age of religiosity.

⁹⁸ Stark, "*Secularization, R.I.P.*", 255; quot. from Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion* (New York: Holt, 1997), 476.

emergence of radical religious groups and cults.⁹⁹ Accordingly, secular developments such as the gradual loss of power of some traditional and low-membership churches and the weakening of denominational ties do not mean the end of people's need for religion and the demise of religion but the beginning of a process of religious revival and experience.¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, Stark believes that cult formation is a religious reaction against secularisation. He is aware that, except for some cults with a high power of influence, other cults cannot continue. According to Stark, accepting effective cults as a sign of secularisation by simplifying them within religion means not being able to comprehend the relationship between new religions and secularisation. Because it is not an accurate assessment to consider people who are devoted to supernatural beliefs as secularised people. Stark prefers to see the emergence or existence of a cult¹⁰¹ as a religious reaction against it rather than a phenomenon of secularisation.¹⁰² Stark, who is aware that there may be declines and rises in the rate of religiosity, pointed out that there is a “relatively stable religiosity” in societies.

3.3.4. Impact of Education and Science on Secularisation

Stark argues that education is not directly related to secularisation and therefore people's interest in the church does not decrease as their level of education increases.¹⁰³ He also disagrees with the secularisation theorists' prediction that religious interest will decrease with the spread of science. According to him, in the modern period, although science increases the dominance of human beings over material life, it remains ineffective in solving people's search for ultimate meaning, and religious demand continues.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, Stark believes that the religious demands of societies are continuous, and the activities of active religious groups increase people's religious interests.¹⁰⁵ However, the extent to which each religious activity increases interest in religion and the nature of what Stark calls

⁹⁹ *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* ed. Linda Woodhead, Paul Heelas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 469; See more information Keith A. Roberts, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1990), 201; Ahmadi, *Bir Sekülerleşme Teorisi Olarak Varoluşsal Güvenlik Teorisinin Analizi*, 48.

¹⁰⁰ Stark - Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, 304;

¹⁰¹ “This movement is a deviant religious organization with novel beliefs and practices” for more details Stark-Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, 239.

¹⁰² Stark - Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, 437.

¹⁰³ Roger Finke - Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America: 1776-2005: Winners and Losers In Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 85.

¹⁰⁴ Stark-Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, 282-283.

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1995),199; Ünver, *Peter L. Berger ve Rodney Stark'ın Din Kuramlarında Dinsel Çoğulculuk Anlayışı*, 355.

religious demand is unclear. The second closed issue is that if secularisation is unrelated to education, the question of why people with lower education are more religious, even if unconsciously, remains unanswered. The development of science and the increase in knowledge, the questioning of Christian dogmas, the belief in the Trinity in Christianity, and some of the information in the creation chapter of the Torah, which are contrary to science, make Stark's claims valid mostly on the scale of Christianity. For example, it can be said that some scientific facts mentioned in a divine book such as the Qur'an were impossible to know with the level of knowledge at the time of its revelation. These have been recently determined by scientific developments. Therefore, these will make people more conscious and sincere religious rather than less religious. It can be stated that the religiosity that Stark claims to have increased or changed in our age is a judgement based on considering all forms of spiritual beliefs and practices associated with religiosity.

3.3.5. Formal Academic Approaches Promote Secularisation

According to Stark, formal academic approaches to religion and religious institutions are effective in increasing secularisation. Academics seek purely rational explanations and doubt the reality of miracles instead of being grateful to God for miraculous events; in the final analysis, such an attitude encourages secularisation. Ultimately, they reject miracles, regarding them as an illusion rather than a divine favour.¹⁰⁶

Stark, by expressing secularisation as a process of religious transformation, states that religious structures have been eroded by modern science and that they have survived thanks to revivalist movements. Therefore, Stark differs from secularists by stating that the view that secularisation abolishes religion is only a narrow understanding of church-sect transformation.¹⁰⁷ Eventually, the overwhelming evidence led even the majority of social scientists to rethink their belief that religion was fading. It became clear that the notion of secularisation erasing religion was based on a limited view, focusing only on the transition from sects to churches. While social scientists correctly noted that some major denominations were moving away from traditional Christian doctrines, they overlooked how other parts of the religious landscape were reacting. Secularisation doesn't lead to a rise in irreligion; rather, it often spurs a revival. As established religious organizations become more institutionalized and less dynamic, they create space for new sects that

¹⁰⁶ Finke - Stark, *The Churching of America: 1776-2005: Winners and Losers In Our Religious Economy*, 47.

¹⁰⁷ For more details Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, 200-201.

reinvigorate religious traditions. Consequently, rather than seeing a general decline in religion, we observe a shift where existing religious groups lose influence, and new ones emerge.¹⁰⁸

3.3.6. Secularisation as an Encouraging Innovation and a Self-limiting Process

Stark acknowledges that traditional religious institutions face great challenges in the modern world. However, according to him, although secularisation has reduced the influence of traditional religious institutions, it has not eliminated religious practices and has led to the emergence of new religious interpretations and religious understandings instead of weakening traditional religions.¹⁰⁹

Against the old paradigmatisers who point to the weakening of religious institutions as evidence for secularisation, Stark considers it scholarly frivolity to ignore the quantitative increase in both new religious movements and participation in these movements. Therefore, according to Stark, contrary to popular belief, secularisation is a phenomenon that encourages religious revival and innovation. However, new religious movements and formations emerging from traditional religions continue to be alive today. Although there is a misconception that secularisation is only a characteristic of the modern period, in reality, secularisation is an ongoing process in every religious tradition. Therefore, it can be concluded that secularisation leads to the weakening of some religious institutions rather than the end of religion.¹¹⁰ Stark finds the emergence of new religious movements within the traditional religious structure contrary to the existence of secularisation. More precisely, he presents new religious movements and the religious vitality within these formations as evidence for his view that secularisation does not exist. This is evidence that secularisation in the meaning of the proponents of classical paradigm defense hasn't emerged.

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented a comprehensive overview of the concept of secularisation and its varying interpretations in sociological literature. Wilson, Berger, and Bruce who embraced the *old paradigm*, argue that modernization leads to the decline of

¹⁰⁸ Finke - Stark, *The Churched of America: 1776-2005: Winners and Losers In Our Religious Economy*, 45-46.

¹⁰⁹ For more information Stark-Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, 304.

¹¹⁰ For more information Stark-Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, 304; Besides discussion about globalization, religion and secularisation see more information. Hasan Coşkun, "Küreselleşme Sürecinde Din", *Gaziosmanpaşa University Journal of Theology Faculty* 5/2 (Aralık 2017), 115-134.

religion's influence on social institutions. On the contrary, the proponents of the *new paradigm* that is Stark, Bainbridge, and Davie, have contended that religion remains significant in modern society and critiques the old paradigm as ethnocentric and poorly grounded. The last and *alternative/eclectic paradigm* defended by Chaves, Casanova, Yamane, and Ostwalt focuses on the differentiation of social institutions from religious influence rather than the decline of religion itself and addresses the phenomenon in non-Western contexts. Among these paradigms, the old one is critiqued for its assumption that modernization inevitably leads to a decline in religiosity. On the contrary, the new paradigm argues that individual religiosity remains high and that new religious movements reflect a continuing or even increasing interest in religion. It can be stressed that Wilson regards the decline in church attendance in the USA as evidence. In contrast, Stark argues against the idea that modernization necessarily diminishes religion and highlights the persistence, and transformation of religious practices.

To sum up, as for the powerful and weak points of Bryan Wilson's and Stark's theory of secularization by comparing both, Wilson's theory seems to be particularly valid for Western European societies, it struggles to fully encompass religious experience on a global scale. On the other hand, Rodney Stark's critique of secularization, while valuable in highlighting the continuing importance of religion in modern societies, risks ignoring the social and cultural contexts of religion. While both theories contribute to understanding the relationship between modernization and religion, they cannot provide a universal explanation on their own. The fact that secularization varies regionally and culturally suggests the need for a unifying approach to these two perspectives.

Ultimately, it is understood that secularisation theories need to account for the varying impacts of modernization on religion in different societies. It cannot be forgotten that while traditional religious institutions may weaken, new forms of religiosity and religious movements continue to emerge, challenging the notion of a straightforward decline in religion. Wilson's and Stark's opinions represent two contrasting interpretations of the impact of secularisation on religion. Wilson sees the emergence of New Religious movements as indicative of a weakening of traditional religion, with these movements serving as a more secular and individualized response to the loss of communal religious authority. However, Stark interprets secularisation as a catalyst for religious renewal,

where new religious movements are not a sign of decline but of religious resilience and adaptation. In essence, Wilson emphasizes the secularisation and fragmentation of religion, while Stark focuses on the continued vitality and innovation within the religious sphere, even in a secularized context.

In conclusion, Stark's arguments and observations on this matter appear to be not only more rational and constructive but also more closely aligned with the specifics of the case at hand. His reasoning reflects a nuanced understanding that enhances the overall coherence and relevance of the discussion. Additionally, Stark's approach is marked by a balanced perspective, which contributes to a more comprehensive and objective evaluation of the issue.

In summary, recent research conducted in the United States lends further support to Wilson's perspective, reinforcing his interpretation of current trends as clear indicators of secularisation. Unlike Stark's view, which tends to categorize every New Religious Movement as an expression of religiosity, Wilson's analysis suggests that these phenomena should not uniformly be seen as evidence of religious vitality. Each of these paradigms has its own important aspects. Preferring one over the other would be ideological rather than scientific. It can be argued that each has its strengths and aspects that can be used.

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