

“The Invisible Religion”

- A mossgrown milestone or a gate to the present?

Gustav Erik Gullikstad Karlsaune

“The Invisible Religion”, the book written by Thomas Luckmann and published in New York in 1967, turned out to be a milestone in the history of the sociology of religion in the last century. Scholars will agree on that. At that time, no one in the field was unaffected by this essay on “The Problem of Religion in Modern Society”, as the subtitle says. It actually provoked a discussion among all students of religion, not only the sociologists. This also included theologians, most of whom – especially the supporters of neo-orthodoxy – were very critical towards Luckmann’s definition of religion, an allegedly non-substantive one.

Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann’s companion, who had studied theology in a Lutheran frame of reference, joined the theologians in their critic, in an appendix in “The Sacred Canopy”, his own monographic contribution to the sociology of religion, published also in 1967. Here he equips the critics of Luckmann with a tool they have used since, the categorization of definitions of religion in definitions of substance and definitions of function. But Berger also, in his way of putting the argument, makes no hindrance for a plain either-or arrangement of positions; that is, one has to be either a substantivist or a functionalist. And furthermore, according to this dichotomy, anybody with theological responsibility, or even religious interest or respect, is supposed to be a “substantivist”. The “functionalists” on the contrary are to be non-religious or even anti-religious.

Actually, Thomas Luckmann anticipates a discussion of definitions in chapter III in “The Invisible Religion”. In some way, he yields to a functional definition himself, but definitely neither to a functionalist, nor an anti-religious attitude. He could of course foresee the discussion. Peter and Thomas had already had more than 15 years to discuss the matter since they first met in New York in the early 1950ies. However, as Berger also knows,

accusing Luckmann of being against religion and religiosity is positively wrong – even if, at the same time and in contrast to Berger, for Luckmann, questions about his own religious attitude or affiliation would be totally irrelevant in a scientific setting.

Despite the attempts to set aside the book and the author by a discussion about definitions, “The Invisible Religion” remains intriguing. Why? I think because of its qualities as a social scientific analysis. This quality is due to Luckmann’s own skills, of course, but even more to the scientific tradition he represents, to wit, phenomenology. The book is no arbitrary soloist contribution of a rare brilliant mind on an isolated topic, incidentally contemporary religion. Thomas Luckmann relies heavily on the significant scientific paradigm of phenomenology. He writes out of this tradition and refers to this scientific universe throughout the book, in every paragraph.

Phenomenology is a program for scientific work. But as a program it is not a closed universe, but a starting point for a scientific approach to reality, especially human reality, like society and culture for instance. It can, however, still be called a program, because it is comprehensive and it is integrating all the activities a science involves, from the universal structures of the consciousness, to the specific phenomenon at sight. Phenomenology equipped Thomas Luckmann with all the tools he needed to approach contemporary religion and analyze it the way he does. If one focuses too much on Luckmann as an individual and looks superficially at the scientific approach he represents, he might easily pass into history as one of those significant minds living at a certain time, writing books that were good at that time, but now belong to the past.

However, Thomas Luckmann himself, as he is still around, and “The Invisible Religion” remain interesting for the present because he is one of the best representatives of phenomenology today and in this book he demonstrates a starting point for the sociology of religion in this scientific perspective. Edmund Husserl had launched a scientific program to solve “Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften”. It was Thomas Luckmann’s training as a scientist in this phenomenological program by the teachers at the *New School for Social Science* in New York enabled him to achieve the penetrating analysis of contemporary religion contained in the small book that stirred so many scholars studying religion.

The absorbing interest in the notion ‘definition’ is typical for a traditional science as derived from scholasticism. Is this one of the forces provoking the crisis Husserl talks about? I dare only ask, I have not investigated the topic enough to make it a statement. But already Max Weber felt the current interest in definitions somewhat inadequate when he states in the first line of the first paragraph: “To define ‘religion’, to say what it *is*, is not possible at the start of a presentation such as this. Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study.” And Max Weber never arrived at a definition. True is, that the tradition of the absorbing interest in definitions is less explicitly paradigmatic than phenomenology. Of course. It does not need to give any account. It is still taken for granted in many academic circles that this is the way scientific analysis is done whatever the field is.

On a closer look we can see that ‘definitions’ as apprehended in the way that entails the categorization of definitions of substance or of function, are used delineate and clarify units in an abstract stock of knowledge that is already at hand. The alleged ‘substance’ for

definitions is *there*, in these abstractions. Hence, religion will be defined from the abstract so-called ‘substance’ of collections of ideas on God, gods, divinity etc. that we already possess through knowledge from texts in the history of religions – but too often their reference has been to the doctrines of different religious traditions.

In this way of thinking, a consequence is that if there is no such given idea that can be used to confine the unit to be defined, what we talk about, can be anything, and thus it is nothing. The tendency in Berger’s critic of Thomas Luckmann goes in this direction. This argument, however, represents a general way of thinking and approach to reality, it is not for religion specifically. What is substance and what is function, is relative. Luckmann has himself a substantial reference as well. This is his knowledge about the human being, the anthropology he has. His question thus is: where does religion originate in anthropology? We could phrase the question: What is the substance of the stock of knowledge about human experience activated when we are compelled to talk about religion? Compared to this designation of religion, any concrete knowledge at hand in an established religious institution functions as the religion. And that is it.

At a closer look, I think, we are forced to put forward the fundamental question of whether there in the scientific approach is exercised an empirical attitude or not. If focus is alone on the conceptual treatment of a theoretical knowledge at hand that is mainly a contribution by the normative knowledge of specific religious institutions, I will not call this empirical. If focus is on the immediate reality of human experience, I will call it empirical – and exactly the immediate reality in experience is the concern of phenomenology. From this point of view, the concern of the “substantivists” implies, as it thus seems to me, applying a metaphysical and normative understanding of concepts and conceptualization, and not a empirical and descriptive interest. A metaphysical and normative position like this might of course be legitimate concern for the theological experts of correct belief in a specific religious tradition. But is it a concern of the sociologist of religion?

Another fundamental assumption built into the substantivist argument is the idea that religion and religiosity could and should be observed as areas of human activity opposed to everyday life and common experience. This also might be a legitimate concern of the theologians, and I think especially the neo-orthodox ones, which gives priority to any thought that maintains God’s world in a space kept apart from man’s world. But, again, is the either-or matrix on religion and everyday life a compulsory prerequisite for the student of religion? Is it useful to take for granted that a person *in* his or her religion in general, even in Christianity and not only in the explicitly pantheistic or panentheistic religiosity, will split the religiosity and the concerns of everyday life into two different space spheres? Or is it time for a basic conception of man that integrates everyday life experience and religion? Answering positively to this last question implies that we will also conceive of religion as a universal human trait. There is likely to be no difference between the religious and the non-religious people any more. This is what Thomas Luckmann takes for granted in “The Invisible Religion”. Probably this idea of religion being universal is one of the reasons why the book still is intriguing and provokes protests.

Of course, in order to pursue this idea in his investigation, Luckmann has to set aside all metaphysical and normative ideas about religion, be they from religious or anti-religious experts. He does not work from any pre-established knowledge about what religion is, and he is certainly not accepting the either-or matrix as to a human world on one side and a metaphysical one on the other, the last known only by experts in and on religion. But where would an attempt to locate where religion originates in human experience start and go? Or even more precisely, where in the ordinary everyday experience of ordinary human beings does it originate? We are not to confine ourselves to the experiences of extraordinary persons, be it the religious *virtuosi* of either mystical visions or metaphysical learned insights.

If we take a look at the text in “The Invisible Religion”, the attempt to locate religion in human experience is articulated explicitly only in chapter III, the one entitled “The Anthropological Condition of Religion”. All together this chapter contains only 9 pages out of app. 130. Not much of the book is actualized if one looks only for a definition of religion, because here is where it is most likely to be found. However, what is written in chapter three is certainly fundamental for the whole analysis in the book. But again, not so much because of the concept of religion as for the image of man it contains. Or, put differently: the anthropology it contains, in the strict sense of this concept. Eventually, through all that we have discussed so far, the discerning question might be: What comes first, religion or the human being? Or, culture or the human being? Or, society or the human being? Or, institutions or the human being? Or even, person and Self or the human being? One should not confuse an historical individual with the question about the human being universally.

In an empirical frame of reference, any attempt to make the human being the second threatens to lapse into assumptions about religion, culture, society, institutions, and individual persons, which are of a metaphysical nature that an empirical social scientist is expected to avoid. Since there is no way in sociology to jump anthropology and the influence of the image of man that the researcher has, even if it is not articulated, it is there tacit, and then maybe even more thoroughly affecting the analysis. And it is on this level, with respect to the fundamental question about human experience, that phenomenology really actualizes itself.

We do not find explicit references to phenomenology in “The Invisible Religion”. But the perspective of phenomenology and the consequences of the phenomenological method certainly are there, on every page. The focus on the subjective experience of human beings, which is presupposed in the discussion in chapter III about where religion originates, is entailed from phenomenology. The way backwards, so to speak, from a current and taken for granted idea about religion to a quest for where to find the final origin for this in the human being, might also be seen as parallel to the method of phenomenological reduction.

Although phenomenology is part of philosophy (but as a strict science, according to Husserl), it is so important, because it gives a philosophical foundation for sociology, a foundation Max Weber for instance did not have for his idea of *Verstehen*. The integration of Weber and Husserl, assuring sociology a foundation in phenomenology, was the achievement of Alfred Schütz, starting in a studious work that first produced “Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt” from 1932. Schütz and Husserl met personally several times in the 1930ies. Husserl considered Schütz to be one of the persons who really understood what he was aiming

at. Then it is interesting that the uneasiness about Husserl's concept of the transcendental ego, which Schütz felt from the beginning, ended up in a way that he did not abandon phenomenology, but introduced his concept about a so-called "mundane phenomenology", the analysis of the meaning structures in the human experience of everyday life.

Thomas Luckmann has developed the relation between phenomenology and sociology further, and has applied, from the example of proto-physics, the concept proto-sociology on phenomenology. Phenomenology and its profound studies of subjectivity provides sociology with concepts concerning meaning in human experience and how human consciousness structures the reality as a Life-World and thus also the social reality as a human reality. Again, it is very important not to mix the interest in universal subjectivity in phenomenology with a one-sided interest in individuality as a person appears concretely and historically. The human being is the same as the experiencing subject.

Without certain knowledge of phenomenology, "The Invisible Religion" is likely not to be fully understood. It will end up just as an elaboration on a couple of concepts like "marginalization" and "privatization" and that's it. Seen in the perspective of phenomenology, however, the book is opening the gate to a further scientific analysis of religion. The striking concepts are consequence of the analytical perspective

All together, the whole argument of "The Invisible Religion" is hardly conceivable at all without the influence from phenomenology through a series of lecturers at the New School for Social Research in New York, where Thomas Luckmann – and Peter L. Berger – studied. And the basic and significant role of concepts like consciousness, experience, subject, person, Life-World, universal structures, and so forth, is likely to get lost.

Biology

There is, however, another scientific reference – beside phenomenology – which is very important to know, to understand the anthropology exercised by Thomas Luckmann (and also, but to a lesser degree, I think, by Peter L. Berger). That is the human being as an organism. This is studied foremost in biology or physiology of course. Thomas Luckmann uses both the perspective and the knowledge in these fields, especially as they are developed by people like Arnold Gehlen, Helmuth Plessner and Adolf Portmann. In "The Invisible Religion" we find references to Gehlen and Plessner, but in other works by Luckmann Portmann appears as well. These authors develop a perspective where, given the fundamental knowledge about the physiology of man as we know it from modern biology, they focus on the peculiar trait of the human being that we call the mind, spirit, soul, or also consciousness and experience. Their book titles reveal the problem setting: by Portmann "Biologie und Geist", by Gehlen "Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter" and "Urmensch und Spätkultur", by Plessner "Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch". Portmann and Plessner are actually from the outset pure biologists. In the area of investigations of organically based human experience, Plessner's main contribution might be seen as the notion "the eccentric man". The idea is that organisms live naturally as the actual center in their own world of natural environment. The human beings, on the contrary, are in their conscious experience set aside from this organically

conditioned center. In their experience, their consciousness make them look from an ex-centrically standpoint at their own biologically conditioned center of a natural world.

Looked at in integrated combination, as in Thomas Luckmann's perspective in "The Invisible Religion", the phenomenological focus on the human consciousness, or the subjective experience, that is the same, is enriched and secured an organic base by the contributions of these biologists. And all this is exactly what Luckmann uses to locate the origin of religion. Religion originates in the experience of transcendence. But, here we have to add immediately, not transcendence as somewhere else, like in "the transcendent" opposed to "the immanent". Rather as a process or a series of recurring processes of transcending the borders of existential conditions. In "The Invisible Religion" Luckmann focuses on the human being's transcendence of its biological nature. Since this transcendence is triggered by *the social Other*, this is also defines religion fundamentally social. Out of the-face-to-face situation in encounters with similar organisms, there emerges You and Me and I and Self as structures of the human consciousness and experience. And as this continues, the person, for instance, realizes him- or herself describing a biography, a limited span of time stretched out in a history that transcends the individual in a past and a future. As the dimension of transcendence is kindled, so to speak, in human consciousness, it becomes a fundamental trait and is confirmed again and again through the ongoing human experience.

Religion is a universal phenomenon and the process of the transcendence of the biological nature is a universal phenomenon in mankind, Thomas Luckmann writes in "The Invisible Religion" at the end of chapter III. It might be interesting to note here that when the German translation "Die unsichtbare Religion" appeared in 1991, there was a chapter attached as "Nachtrag". In this "postscript" Thomas Luckmann states that in the almost 25 years which had past, nothing had happened that should make him change his mind fundamentally. But there is a relevant elaboration he wants to do, and that is on the concept of transcendence. In the meantime he had been working on the fragments of a manuscript left by Schütz which later appeared as "The Structures of the Life-World". Alfred Schütz did not do anything focused on religion. His focus was on another universal phenomenon; the everyday life experience as it is structured by the human consciousness. Among that what he elaborated in these investigations, was transcendence, which here of course means transcendence as a regular part of everyday life, not something opposed to it. This is also Luckmann's own view. Luckmann adds these elaborations to his book in his "Nachtrag" as an account of three levels of transcendence, of "small", "middle range", and "great transcendences" that all might occur out from the everyday life experience of the human being.

By now, it should be boringly clear that focusing on the questions about the definition of religion derails an adequate apprehension of "The Invisible Religion". However, it is also true that Luckmann's concern about locating where religion originate in universal human experience, is the same as giving a qualified sociological designation of religion according to what his – or his scientific tradition's – idea of what social reality is. Achieving this was one of the solutions made to "the problem of religion in modern society" as the subtitle of the book says. The contemporary studies in sociology of religion at that time were not able to understand and analyze religion adequately because they relied upon definitions of religion produced by and being dependent upon perspectives that were non-empirical and non-

sociological. Actually, in this inability is where the book starts evolving its argument. Or even more, here is where Thomas Luckmann himself started his original analysis of religion. Probably the ideas developed in “The Invisible Religion” emerged as his dissatisfaction grew with what he was doing during his Ph.D. project. This was at that time a traditional empirical study of four protestant parishes in Germany in the mid-1950ies. It was finished with a thesis in 1956, evaluated by a committee where the Norwegian sociologist Arvid Brodersen, born in Trondheim, was a member.

In 1959, an article came that contained the first analytical elements that were later developed in “The Invisible Religion”. The article was a comprehensive survey of all recent empirical studies in the sociology of religion, after the Second World War, that is. The analytical elements evolved, and in 1963, encouraged by Arnold Bergstraesser in Freiburg, who was in charge of Benita Luckmann’s doctoral project and invited Thomas Luckmann for guest lectures during the Summer, was published the German book “Das Problem der Religion in der modernen Gesellschaft”. This book is the basis for the English one. It contains the same ideas, even if the text is no plain translation. The German book was rewritten for an English speaking audience. The German title would not had any sale’s appeal either, so it had to be changed. The editor came up with the idea of “The Invisible Religion”, and Thomas Luckmann approved of it, even if the notion cannot be found in the text of the book, and Thomas Luckmann probably never uses an expression like that, it is not how he conceptualizes religion in any respect.

Realizing how profound the analysis is, it is really curious that Thomas Luckmann quite arbitrarily found himself involved in a project in the sociology of religion. The project was initiated by Carl Mayer and was big enough to need four research assistants. Peter L. Berger was designated to be one of them. However, he was drafted, and since the project was about to be launched, urgency forced Mayer to ask Thomas Luckmann to step in. He did, even if, at that time he did not find – as he tells in an interview – neither religion nor Germany particularly interesting, only the money attached to the work. However, how incidentally it happened that he got involved, it is remarkable how profound his critic turned out to be, not of religion, but of the sociological research on religion. It even affected the minimal activity of sociology in Norway. At that time there was a sociological account called “Det norske samfunn”, which had a chapter on religion also. In 1968, the chapter produced by Thomas Mathiesen and Otto Hauglin had a very neat and transparent logic built on the four main concepts “contributors” and “receivers” and “attitude” and “behavior” – and of course, it all was about the church, despite it should be about “religion in Norway”. It was to early for the book published in 1967 to have any influence on this chapter. However, the chapter in the issue of 1975, written by Hauglin alone, was severely affected by Thomas Luckmanns critic in “The Invisible Religion” and ruined the transparent logical design it had before.

Chapter I

Thomas Luckmann makes the first chapter in “The Invisible Religion” a discussion about the common identification of religion with the church institution. The title of the chapter is “Religion, Church and Sociology”. What he mainly does, is opening the horizon to

investigate not only religion outside the church, but non-institutional religion in general. This moment was elaborated quite extensively in a Norwegian context later by Ole Gunnar Winsnes in his doctoral thesis “E’ du rel’giøs, eller...?” Theology was the one, which is providing the world with generally defined concepts of religion. And of course, easily quite inadequate providers, since theology is part of the church institutions, not outside it and in company with social or human sciences. Actually, theology seems for Thomas Luckmann to be rather uninteresting as a partner in scholarly discussion. Quite opposite to Peter L. Berger, who, at least in his younger years, really tried to be in dialogue with the theologians. Whatever can be discussed further here, the main thing is that Thomas Luckmann in the first chapter points to the limitations of a church-based definition of religion, and he opens the horizon to a general, or if possible, universal understanding of religion.

Chapter II

His sort of neglecting theology does not mean that Thomas Luckmann disrespects church sociology for what it is. He gives a systematic account of its findings in chapter II, “Church-oriented Religion on the Periphery of Modern Societies”. Here appears what many think is what Luckmann means with “the problem of religion in modern society”, the churches have lost their central position in modern societies. They are marginalized. Well, it is a problem – for the churches. Another and “churchly” word for it is secularization. But the sociological problem with religion is actually different, and that is, there is a lot of activities going on that anyone will consider to be religion, and the concept of religion is too narrow – or rather narrowed – to grasp the phenomena. And there is another trait about modern society, if one looks at it sociologically (and not theologically or politically or in another way ideologically), not only the church institution is on the fringe of society, but any institution. Sociologically, stating that the church, or church-oriented religiosity, is on the periphery of modern society is to point to an example of what is going on in the society as a whole. Thus one can suspect, it is not religion that has lost its position or credibility, but the restricted historical phenomenon of institution as we know it. It is a gross mistake to think that religion has disappeared, a mistake due to the arbitrary historically dependent identification of church, religion and institution, which social scientists have contributed to as they have been servants for church projects and not kept up the heritage from the classics in sociology. Thus secularization, understood as a disappearance of religion for good, is a myth, as the title of an article Thomas Luckmann wrote around 1970, states. It is the identification of church, religion and institution that actually makes religion invisible for the contemporary world. As if commitment does not exist any more, since people are not committed to any institution.

If we now look at the construction of “The Invisible Religion” as a book, the first and second chapters take in account and critically analyses the current knowledge in the sociology of religion and breaks off there. And in a parenthesis, ladies and gentlemen, there is still after more than 30 years of this critic being accessible, still research done in this way called sociology of religion. But back to the text, what the analysis done in this chapter ends up with, is mainly an open horizon. There is, if we might say, an invisible religion out there, how can it

be made visible? To answer this question, Luckmann starts over again, from the basics, the universal anthropological condition of religion. This we have already briefly been through.

But now, what comes after the new fundament? Before we proceed, we should give a look back at the introduction. Actually, it is an integrated part of the book. Here, more than in the following three chapters we have discussed, the fundamentals of sociology are introduced, and that is what we need to shed light on the rest of the book. I think here the main difference between the text of the German version and the English is, too. Anyone who has had a glimpse into the text of “Das Problem der Religion in der modernen Gesellschaft” might have been struck by the monster of an endnote the first one is. It is a 4 pages note in footnote size print. But it is actually an interesting account of the classical approach compared to what appear to be done in the sociology of religion after the Second World War. The content of the note is in the English book reappearing mainly in the chapter “Introduction”, but some thoughts are also brought into chapter I.

We have pointed out before that “The Problem of Religion in Modern Society” turns out to be two-sided. On the one hand, there is the empirical field where the churches are driven to the fringes of the society, explained as a general dereligionizing of the human world. On the other, there is the lack of capability by the social sciences to see what is going on, there might still be a non-institutional religion, but it is invisible. The “Introduction” prepares us mostly for the last problem, the capability of the social sciences to say anything reasonable about religion that makes us also see the invisible. One thing is that social scientists have acted solely as method servants in church driven projects and not cared about systematic theory. But this is only the symptom of the lack of systematic theory in general in much of the social sciences. And the main component the systematic theory should provide the researcher with is a clarified concept on what society, social life, or social reality is, on the one hand. On the other, what meaning, subject, and human experience is, or, more precise, what human beings as organisms with the peculiar equipment of what we call consciousness are. Again and again throughout the first chapters Luckmann points to the lack of systematic theory, and points to the arbitrary influence of tacit assumptions in the social sciences. In the “Introduction” he sort of explains the situation by the neglecting of the classics, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. And, of course, in fact they were both doing sociology of religion as an integrated part of their sociological investigations in general, in the empirical field, and in the historical material, and in the theory works of both. Luckmann also maintains there is a convergence between the two in their theoretical view of man and social reality. Important, of course, since the German and the French tradition of sociology were rather independent and parallel. What Luckmann points to in their view is the significance of the individual in the social order. This is also makes up the main feature of the book he and Peter L. Berger had published the year before, in 1966, “The Social Construction of Reality”, the dialectics. One misses the whole idea of that book, if one misses the presupposition of social reality being a dialectics, a dialectics created by the society and the individual, not as two separated entities, but as the individual *in* society. We could even bring in George Herbert Mead and say: the dialectics created by “Mind, Self, and Society”, since the dialectics is between the universes of meaning in the actions (the minds of people as they act).

Another prerequisite to be sure to grasp the essentials in this sociological theory, which Berger and Luckmann represents, is a clear concept of human subjectivity, and again, as universal experience not as a historical being more or less “subjective” and “individualistic” and “egoistic”. This means that we have a subject on the individual side, the subjective side, but we do also have subjects on the other side, as the objective society. Institutions are subjects acting as collectives, they are not animated impersonal structures. Society is thoroughly humanized in this sociological perspective. These enables us also to see the cruel actions of individuals made invisible by focus on the so-called unavoidable forces of structure. In the elaboration of these problems, we have where phenomenology the most represents a fundamental reference for sociology.

Of course, at that time, to state an absolute lack of systematic theory would be ridiculous by Luckmann, since Talcott Parsons was well around and very influential, exactly with a system theory built upon “structure” and “function”. He had even studied in Germany and introduced Weber and Durkheim to the main stream American sociology. But systematic theory is not the same as system theory. Like function does not mean only what functionalists mean by the notion. However, the difference between the approaches represented by Talcott Parsons and by Thomas Luckmann and his tradition is all too extensive to even touch upon. One might say though, that the investigation of subjectivity is the foundation Luckmann’s sociology, the idea of system designates Parsons’. Just to illustrate (or maybe complicate) the matter, a quotation from a letter from Alfred Schütz to Harold Garfinkel January 19, 1954 might be interesting:

Could the difference between Parsons and me rather be interpreted in the difference of the level of research? Parsons thinks that empirical investigations, if carried on far enough and grouped in accordance with a conceptual scheme, will lead by necessity into the insight into problems, which could only be handled on a purely theoretical level. I, starting from a basic philosophy, try to explain the empirical facts as special applications of the insight won by phenomenological analysis of the structure of consciousness.

If I am now permitted to jump to chapters IV and V in “The Invisible Religion”, we can do so because we have a key to understand why just these are here. They are put here as integrated parts of the book, and not accidental elaborations of more or less actual topics one should take up. Because, after the foundation is laid in chapter III, how religion is rooted in human experience of transcendence, the fundamental dialectics of the individual in social reality is actualized. The question about social institutions, the objective side of the social reality, is then elaborated in chapter four “The Social Forms of Religion”. The question about the person, the subjective side of the social reality, is elaborated in chapter five “Individual Religiosity”. How these elaborations go, is a question of studying corollaries and we shall leave them to the readers.

In stead we might underline how we in chapter six actually is back to the beginning, to the “Introduction”, where the dialectics of the actual individual experience in modern society, is introduced. In the chapters three, four and five, the general fundament for sociological

analysis is laid. With chapter six we are back to the present state of the dialectics. But we are also now equipped to renew the question about where religion is in this dialectics today. I think we should revisit the "Introduction" for a moment, to bring along Luckmann's question about the possibility that there has been a fundamental change in the location of the individual in the social order in modern society. This corresponds with what we stated before about the church institutions being on the fringes of modern society, because institutions in general are.

But how are institutions put on the fringes, in what way? By the individuals of course, in the courses of action they chose. Social life is always an arena where people act. This means then that in people's meaning system accompanying their actions, the institutions are not of much interest. So what do people do? They compose their own worlds, as they also compose their own religions. Here we see the first glimpse of a gate to a series of very interesting possibilities of analysis that definitely are not outdated by exercise of the concept "privatization", as if people turn to a politically destructive egocentrism.

The observation of a shift in the dialectics between institutions and individuals sheds an interesting light on society that seems apt for describing a trend. Earlier, it was taken for granted that a religious institution could provide a person with a world to live in. The question of conversion was the same as joining and commit to an institutionalized religion. Eventually, one could leave one to join another, or one could leave the society, "the world", and its lack of ability to provide one with real existence. The encompassing religious institutions could of course provide you with not only rituals at certain times sacred times, but also being more remote a sacred guarantee in the more secular weekdays, and thus play a role in all the shades of individual human existence.

Apparently, there has been a change. Institutions are socially marginalized. Are the institutions today unable to provide people with a plausible world to live in? Are they too poorly equipped to cover the whole range of challenges individuals today meet in their lives? If they do not have a plausible world to offer, maybe they have some bits and pieces?

So, when a personal world is not at hand any more, as one institution or another provided it, the challenge to build the world is moved to the initiative of the individual. The question of privatization is not "I freeing myself from institutions", I am left no other possibility, but to construct a world by myself, using the bits and pieces left in the ruins of the institutions. However, one should not lapse heedlessly into an idea of individualism. There is no more reason to conceive of human beings seizing to be religious as seizing to be social. A person that neglects institutions (or even a nation) is not asocial. Since human beings are social primarily in relation to other human beings, not, or at least secondary, in relation to institutions. It depends on the idea of social life, not on empirical reality; if for instance Robert Bellah's now famous "Sheila Larson" is an example of an individualist more or less isolated building a private solipsistic religious world of her own. Actually I have done some preliminary investigation among a similar type of religiosity in Trondheim. They are very resourceful people, but as far as I know they have no idea about such a type of "sheilaism", and they are definitely not practicing it. What is apparent is that this religiosity where individuals construct their own religion is not less social than any other type. It is true that they are indifferent as to institutionalized religion. As they have their main interest focused on

experiences that transcend the immediate sensory experience of the environment. They do not only exchange ideas with other individuals. They created the social form a group. All this of course, because they are human beings. Failing to see that as such they have to be social as well as religious is a fault due to theoretical shortcomings that “The Invisible Religion” might help to overcome – also today.