Secularization and secularity as a determinant of Christianity itself for the establishment of peace and freedom in the World

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Abstract

During several seminars focused on the Social Doctrine of the Church, we addressed the topic of the relationship between religion and the state, which we can call *secularity* or *laicity*. Although our post-Christian society often uses another word - *secularization* - it is not always easy to understand what is hidden under this term. Since the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, we hear many representatives of religions in Central Europe talking about "creeping secularization" and the like. In our European society, we see a sharp decline in religious awareness and a loss of traditional faith. Many religious societies are forced to close their institutions or reorient them to non-religious purposes. All these traditional ideas assume that the religious message (in the Christian sense - the Gospel) could only be expressed in purely religious "environments". In our contribution, we would like to point out *positive (Christian) secularity*, which does not abandon religion but seeks a balanced relationship between earthly and heavenly things.

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Introduction

All religions establish themselves by pointing to a certain form of belief, which for them is the only true one. Nevertheless, we live today in a globalised world without an apparent truth. But precisely in this multicultural society, we need a serious dialogue between religions and civil society. The Church complains about the omnipresent secularization, nevertheless without really distinguishing what is secularism, secularization, the necessary secularity. This is why we want in our

introduction to the contribution to take a look at the meaning of these terms in the modern world.

Secularism is defined as an extreme form of secularization, in which a human being claims complete independence and autonomy from God, for himself and for "his" world, or outright denies the existence of God to support his independence. It is not easy to put atheism on the same footing. Instead, it is the non-admission of another world. Proponents of this position will not recognize that faith (or religion or the Church) has a say in the fundamental questions of life. Autonomy is instead demanded in the domains of ethics, economics, culture and politics, in which faith or religion is thereby rejected in the realm of the outside world. This is how theologians like Karl-Heinz Peschke or Albert Josef Beneš define it classically.[1]

Kaľata shows us that secularization has its foundation in the Bible and the Christian world. The *saeculum* (the human age, race, generation, age, time, century, precocity, naturalness, worldliness) designates the world in historical time (*aeon*) instead of the world of the space *mundus* (*cosmos*). For the Greeks, it is always about space, a place, but for the Hebrews, the world is history (history in time), which has its origin in God. American Cox underscored the stakes adding that it is important to note that Christianity has demystified the Roman Empire![2] The gods there played the role of some magic to achieve unity between human beings and nature, and both have been a part of nature. The Greek *Cosmos* (space and God, and even Society) is deified. The Hebrew space is the creation of God. [3] The world has become history. *Cosmos aeonom et mundus saeculum.* The biblical approach to understanding the world shows us the world as a time-limited entity. Human beings have the right and the duty to use *autonomy* for a good cause. The intent is important here.

If we want to classify the above questions about secularism and secularization, we find these problems in the classical theory of special moral theology, which has been structured according to the Ten Commandments and which, within the framework of the First Commandment, deals with: "I am your God, you shall have no other god but me" (Deut. 5, 6-7; Ex 20,2-3). To have other gods is called: superstition, infidelity. We must also mention idolatry, as a perverse religious practice of Satanism, as well as the pursuit of power. Human beings are therefore encouraged to follow the true God, despite his autonomy. The incarnation of God itself is subject to the same ethical standards as every moral action of a human being and it influences others.

Although the Church often sees itself outside this world, so it is sometimes accused of being a way of fleeing the world, the importance of "worldliness" is also emphasized in Christian terminology, so the importance of the world and service to the world. Even in theology, their autonomy and independence are recognized, namely the fact of engaging in the world, as the duty of every Christian. From then on, tension is created, and it is understandable. Originally, the word secularization also meant *the expropriation of Church property.* It is to this that the notion of desacralization is linked, that is to say, the separation between the secular and the sphere of the Church (the family, marriage, etc.).

Mráz shows the three sources of Christian secularization, which are: the transition from the Greek to the Judaic (biblical) way of thinking, the transition from the essential to the functional in worldview, and the transition from supranaturalism to the empowerment of life. These are the three key biblically-based elements of faith for the expansion of secularization. It is a process of rebirth of the relationship to God, humans and the world, and brings with it the development of natural science, the rise of democratic institutions and the expansion of cultural pluralism. This is achieved through the de-divinization of nature in the process of creation, then through the desacralization of politics about the Exodus and finally

through the deconsecrating of values with the adoption of the law on Mount Sinai, in particular, the law concerning idolatry.[4]

The negative and positive senses of the process of secularization

Another definition speaks of a process of loss of influence of religion on the development of state society. It's about the gradual process of desacralisation of the sacred (but in the broad understanding of religion as implicit religion, it's not about loss, but about other, less visible forms of religion).[5] But it's also about a look at the growth of individual freedom through the displacement of religion into the private sphere (here we run the risk of an unjust society and a failure to establish peace in the world, thus aiding the enemy of freedom – Pope Benedict XVI).[6] And of course, our conservative milieu, such as Professor Sousedík from Prague, speaking of Lessing, Kant, Hegel, and Marx, as well as other conservative circles, speak of a new interpretation of the truths of faith that takes away human's being sense of eternal life.[7]

On the other hand, the advocates of positive secularization, and among them, many theologians rarely quoted in the Church, speak of:

- **the benefits of the secularization of religion** (prof. Vittorio Hösle, Catholic University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, USA)[8]
- **the need for secularization** (methods of organizing public space - Amir Taheri and Claudio Monge OP, the head of the Dominican friars' community in Istanbul)[9]
- **the biblical foundations of secularization and secularity** (the autonomous mission of the things of the world and the need to respect it), which has its place only in Christianity - the question does not arise in other religions (Cardinal Dominik Jaroslav Duka OP).[10]

Secularity from the Perspective of the Christianity

Professor Höffe, in his almanack "Religion im säkularen Europa", also uses the term "secularization" in the sense of "desanctification", "laicisation" or even "de-Christianisation", and writes that this meaning goes back a long way in history, at least to the investiture quarrel between the Emperor and the Pope, and concerns at that time, in the years 1057 to 1122, the autonomy of secular power, the "*secularity of politics*". But he goes even further, asserting that secularization can be traced back to the New Testament so that secularization is not necessarily a phenomenon of turning away from Christianity. Secularization is also a mark of determination, a mark of Christianity itself, according to two biblical words: "Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar -- and God what belongs to God" (Mt 22:21), and "Mine is not a kingdom of this world" (John 18:36).[11]

Finally, adds Höffe, the sociologist of religion Larry Shiner has proposed distinguishing five meanings. According to him, secularization means the disappearance of religions; a global adaptation; a desacralization of the world; the liberation of

society from religions and, finally, a transposition, the transfer of beliefs and behaviours from the religious sphere to the secular sphere.[12] Moreover, Höffe continues, secularization in the 19th century meant the rejection of the doctrine of the two kingdoms represented by Saint Augustine and taken up again in the passage quoted from the Gospel of Saint John, namely the overcoming of the opposition between eternity on the other side and the world on this side. Finally, he supports Max Weber's thesis that Western European society has gone through a process of secularization, in which the disenchantment of the world is combined with increasingly rational dominance of the world that has become meaningful.[13]

Nevertheless, we also have a representative from the Christian perspective, Martin Rhonheimer, Professor Emeritus of the Opus Dei movement at Santa Croce University in Rome, Italy, who speaks precisely about **Christian secularity**.[14] He is joined by Professor Foerst of Regensburg, Germany, who shows **theologically legitimate secularity**, that of accepting this world as a realm of existence because of *its independence and the raison d'être of global and secular realities* according to the final document of the Council Vatican II in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* because "the independence of temporal affairs, is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God and that human being can use them without any reference to their Creator" their legitimacy should not rely on religion, but on their structures, namely 'to be what they are'.[15] Indeed, God created the secular world too - so there's no decadence here, but something proper to be in this world of modern human beings.

However, if secular society is *a priori* considered to be "distant" from God, or even a place "without God", then this interpretation leads us to the atheist position because it denies the Gospel's ability to develop in the world. But then again, if relativism is interpreted as a consequence of secularism, which focuses on modern humans turning away from their fundamental relationship with God and thus creating the "interior desert" as Benedict XVI's interpretation shows when he established the dicastery for the new evangelization under the direction of Archbishop Mgr. Fisichella[16], then we come to struggle against it. On the other hand, precisely secularization, even if it challenges long-established tradition, unleashes great creative forces and is, ultimately, also a living piety, as Prof. Hösle at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in February 2014.[17]

Different types of secularism as a challenge for interreligious ethics

In his lecture for the Innsbruck Circle presented in January 2019 under the title "L'éthique sociale e la postsécularité", Professor Hansjörg Schmid of the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland shows in his analysis that secularity is not a Christian privilege, citing Muslim authors Azzam Tamimi and Bassam Tibi who argue for post-secularity as a challenge for interreligious ethics.[18]

This initial analysis also brings to mind the ambiguity of secularization. This is exactly what emerges from the research of Turkish scholars, who distinguish between:

- **assertive** (confident) **secularism** of the French type - **laïcité** (introduced by Atatürk and his followers). This gives the state the role of protecting people from religion.
- American-style **passive secularism**. This guarantees that every citizen can contribute something, irrespective of

religion, and without excluding religious motivation and the perspective of the marketplace of ideas. (Mustafa Gökçek in his book *The Unity of Turkey derives from secularism*).[19]

According to Gibellini, positive secularization refers to **desacralization**. It is a relative or radical process of the formation of Christian ideas in modern society as a moment of continuity. The relative desacralization we find already in creation, where the Creator himself differs strongly from creation (this marks Christian philosophy against pantheism, monism and animism). This limits the excessive influence of religion on the secular world and pushes every part of society (including the Church) *to seek* **its place in the world**. Finally, as B. Häring notes, it's also about the struggle against the gods: Christianity has secularized this world and freed it from false sacralization.[20] On the contrary, radical secularization builds a world without the sacred.

Secularization as **divinization** shows us that humans separated from God end up *absolutizing* and *idealising* secular reality, and thus *divinising* it inappropriately (*sacralising* it). Anselm Günthör goes on to say that absolute secularism, linked to absolute autonomy of the world, glosses over the need for salvation, redemption and the reality of sin, and promotes the idea that a human can save himself (by ignoring evil and the one who causes it). Such self-validation is utopian and inhuman. Human beings ignore their origins as God's creation and their dependence on God's will. On the contrary, the question is whether a human being focused on God and recognizing God's sovereignty is capable of giving human domains their authority. Is such a person able to have a practical relationship with the world, or on the contrary, is he completely alienated from it?[21]

Ideological problems of secularity

Gellner notes that the Enlightenment taught that a human being becomes human through reason and that it is, therefore, possible to secularize the religious view that a human being becomes human through his/her relationship to the one God.[22]

Later, in his analysis of modern Islam and Marxism, Gellner argues that modern Islam does not divinize the earthly world, but the subject of respect in Islam remains an extraterrestrial, transcendent entity. Although life in this (earthly) world is subject to vast boundaries, it still retains its earthly, profane status. The sacred and profane spheres remain separate, according to Durkheim's theory, and do not defile each other. It's not just that the divine sphere is a refuge from the earthly world. The terrestrial world is also a refuge for the excessive demands and exaltation of religion (that is, in our context, the disproportionate assumption of God's action). According to Gellner, Islam controls and regulates, but despite all this, does not condemn everyday life and its economic component.

For Marxism, however, the case is radically different. According to Gellner, this is a decisive philosophical error. The central philosophical idea of Marxism was to abolish the multiplicity of existence in the earthly and supranatural world. Thus, Marxism not only forbade the use of the world beyond as a source of salvation, to escape from this world but also - and this has become fatal to it - the self-respect of the earthly world and the human activity that surrounds it.[23]

Gellner notes that it is no accident that the intellectual pedigree of Marxism leads, via Hegel, to the pantheism of Baruch Spinoza and his sense of the unity and sacredness of this world. So it's quite possible that Bolshevism didn't cause a lack of the sacred, but rather a lack of the profane. If, in times of economic stagnation, the profane sphere, under the usual circumstances, lost its interest, it was impossible to reject it and give it a routine character, for it was the most sacred home of the sacred. Work was, in fact, the essence of human beings and the "sacrament of the new order". But when this "sacrament" turned out to be extremely polluted, as in Brezhnev's time in the Soviet Union, faith must get lost in it. It could survive the pollution of Stalin's time when it had even flourished, but it could only be "blasphemy" against economic existence.[24]

In the 19th century, global secular claims were recorded to obtain religious instructions to act against them.[25] Pietistic sermons on catastrophic floods are a case in point. While they were still interpreted eschatologically in the early 18th century, in the early 19th they became **a punishment from God**, who calls us not to surrender to the "supremacy of reason", to "rationalism".[26] We addressed this topic in detail in one of our studies.[27]

Relative autonomy as a solution

When we seek to come closer to Christian secularization, we can ask ourselves a few questions: e.g., how is it possible to resolve the issues of God's imperative in the First Commandment and human autonomy as a sign of the Creator's gift and God's trust in the human being? If we speak of secularization, we move between God and the world, this world and the other world, science and religion, surrender to God and service to the world, Church and State, and finally culture (sacred art) and aesthetics. The next question to ask is whether autonomy belongs in the global realm. One very important answer is that **the secular world listens to its laws, which are not subject to the norms of faith and religion**. Nevertheless, it's not true that human beings had no responsibility to use worldly reality in conjunction with their Creator's plan. This is because neither secular human being nor even the secular world was self-created; their existence depends entirely on the will of a higher being - which is why we speak of relative autonomy.[28]

J.-B. Metz adds that secular factors include a certain independence; they are governed by their laws but have their origin in God. Using the process of God's secularization (God incarnates in Jesus for the earthly world), a human being frees himself from the omnipotence of the elements of this world (Kol 2:8,20; Gal 4:3, 1 Corinthians 8:4). This is the foundation of *Christian humanism*.[29]

Vattimo explains, on the contrary, that the kenotic Christian being refers to God who stands in the middle, but consciously renounces his omnipotence and becomes a human being (a brother and friend).[30] Human liberation is therefore important, because, as Barth adds, in seeking and finding God, human beings can use God for their ends.[31] What is at stake here is the correct assessment of secular realities: these will retain real autonomy and worldliness insofar as they have their aims, laws, methods and meanings for the human being's good. But only human being directed towards God is capable of acting objectively, i.e., of managing the things of this world following their autonomy guided by moral laws.

Strict, closed conservatism, however, would like to see the world organized under the dominance of religion (in this case

the Church) as the world's sole leader. But the Church is not called upon to lead the world conservatively, simply because **it is not in a position to identify all the specific solutions to all the world's problems.**That's why we need to respect a certain autonomy of the world's domains (Chenu, Rahner).[32] So, on the one hand, it's important to recognize the signs of the times. On the other hand, we would like to have every chance of having a direct telephone connection line with God (e.g., the explanation of catastrophic events like the tidal wave in Thailand in 2003 and subsequent sermons on God's wrath). Secularization, however, does not mean the secularization of religious values but recognizes them because of faith, independence and the significance of the world itself.[33]

The Church's role in the world

The Church's fundamental task is to **penetrate** the world with the spirit of the Gospel, without dividing it within its structure. As Cardinal Marx of Bavaria rightly remarked when commenting on the sex scandals in the Church, the Church is not here to take on a moralizing role but to preach the Gospel.[34] And another churchman, Mgr. Fazio, explains the need for the **declericalization of the world**. False clericalism does not distinguish between natural and supernatural orders and political and spiritual powers.[35] The doctrine of creation (the main pillar of Christianity) is the basis for a proper understanding of secularization: God has given human beings the possibility of knowing the structure of reality. The harmony between faith and reason leads to respect for the relative autonomy of earthly realities. Many religions are sceptical about human beings' capacity to know. Fundamentalism itself prevents secularization through religious totalitarianism, which violates fundamental human rights.[36]

Vattimo returns to this point with his theory of secularization as an authentic confessional experience. In his view, secularization is a positive moment in the teaching of Jesus Christ and the inner reality of Christianity: as Jesus was abandoned on the cross, a modern human being feels alienated from God, and sometimes alienates himself from God. Human beings' alienation from God absolutizes and idealizes secular reality - and thus sacralises it inappropriately. For a right relationship with the world, a right relationship with God is necessary.[37] And Rhonheimer adds that worldliness only has a place in Christianity. This means the importance of the world and service to the world, its autonomy and independence, but also the duty of every Christian to engage with the world.[38] In the mystery of the Incarnation, secularization takes on its full meaning and purpose. Secularization, therefore, **defends** earthly reality. If it is destroyed," remarks Cardinal Duka, "then the currents that completely suppress our earthly autonomy will be unleashed.[39]

As Gogarten teaches, secularization (de-divinization) is a legitimate consequence of the impact of biblical faith on history.[40] A human being as the Son of God is liberated from the world, but also for the world. The Christian faith secularizes the world and leads it towards autonomy, but also towards human beings' **responsibility** (he is called to adoption as a child of God, and therefore to responsibility towards God: 1 Cor 3:21-23). A society that has not undergone secularization may be characterized by a close link between **politics and religion** (Matt 22:21).

The modern world hopes that human beings will not lose contact with God so that secularization does not degenerate into secularism. From the point of view of the Kingdom of God, secularization means about as much as is feasible. This is

achieved in such a way that human beings subdue this world for their purposes and prevent evil from acting.[41]

Conclusion

In a modern global society, it is very necessary to search and find the right secularity for the active building of peace and freedom and interreligious dialogue as a condition for the development of nations.

The only critical regulatory element of secularization, according to Vattimo, is that it is love whose growth shows how secularization is the authentic religious reality (along with friendship, tolerance, esteem, respect for others, pluralism and democracy). This critical principle bridges the gap between modernity and Christian proclamation. It unmasks the new myths in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ reveals "the true meaning of salvation history". The believer can only believe through *dialogue*. The opposite of this is fundamentalism and dogmatism. Such a believer does not believe in a sumptuous, authoritarian God, but in a dialogical, fraternal and friendly God - a partner, only then able to humbly seek the Kingdom of God and its fulfilment, and to take part in salvation history and the proclamation of the Gospel. In this *dialogue*, postmodern Christianity builds *the ethics of dialogue and solidarity.* Believing in one's faith means hoping to have an authentic faith.[42] That's why this term of Christian secularization is a determinant, a mark of Christianity itself. The only thing to avoid is going too far in the earthly direction, that of the political theology designated by Carl Schmidt, Bultmann, Löwith up to the Gogarten, but this will be the subject of another type of article.[43]

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Footnotes

[1] Peschke, K.-H. (1999), 130 and Beneš, A. J. (1997), 26.

[2] Cox, H. (1965), 19.

[3] Kaľata, D. (1992), 390.

[4] Mráz, M. (2004).

[5] Sousedík, S. (2011), 11.

[6] Benedict XVI (2011).

[7] Sousedík, S. (2011), 11-12.

[8] Hösle, V. (2014).

[9] Swan, M. (2013).

[10] Duka, D. (2010).

[11] Höffe, O. (2018), 15.

[12] Shiner, L. (1967), 207-220.

[13] Höffe, O. (2018), 16.

[14] Rhonheimer, M. (2010).

[15] Gaudium et Spes (1965), 36.

[16] Fischer, K. (2009), 193.

[17] Hösle, V. (2014), 11-12.

[18] Schmid, H. (2018), slides 2-3.

[19] Swan, M. (2013).

[20] Gibellini, R. (1999), 113.

[21] Günthör, A. (1990), 42.

[22] Gellner, E. (2003), 91.

[23] Gellner, E. (2003), 108.

[24] Gellner, E. (2003), 109.

[25] Árnason, J.P./ Wittrock, B. (2012).

[26] Manfred Jakubowski-Tiessen (2013), 187.

[27] Szaniszló, I.-M. V. (2016), 463-476.

[28] Gibellini, R. (1999), 136.

[29] Kaľata, D. (1992), 392-3.

[30] Vattimo, G. (1996), 14.

[31] Barth, K. (1999), 16.

[32] Gibellini, R. (1999), 136.

[33] Rahner, K. / Vorgrimler, H. (1996), 299.

[34] Wirsching, D./Knoller, A. (2017).

[35] Fazio, M. (2007).

[36] Fazio, M. (2007).

[37] Vattimo, G. (1996), 9-10.

[38] Rhonheimer, M. (2010), 322.

[39] Gogarten, F. (1965), 15.

[40] Cox, H. (1965), 23.

[41] Rhonheimer, M (2010), 331.

[42] Vattimo, G. (1996), 95.

[43] Marramao (1999), s. 88.

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