

SECULARISM

and Religious Faith

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It would not be an exaggeration to say that the fall of the Soviet «iron curtain» at the beginning of the 1990s marked the onset of a religious revival in post-Soviet countries. Within several years, however, religion became a mundane matter in society and lost its edge for modern people. Even a superficial analysis of mass religiosity reveals that here we are dealing with a particular phenomenon known as secularism. Basing our judgments on the works of such scholars as Besanc,on, Camus, Kiselov, Kyrlezhev, Petrov (Domontovich), Tillich, M. Epstein, and Escobar, this paper will seek to study the peculiarities of this spiritual phenomenon in comparison with religious faith, and demonstrate the dynamics of worldview paradigms between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

First, we will define the concept of «religious faith» as an ancient and widespread phenomenon. The term «religion» stems from the Latin *religare* meaning «to unite» (a human being with God), or from *religio*, meaning «something holy,» that is, an object of worship or a cult. In this context the word «faith» is also described as a dual term: as confidence in God and personal faithfulness in one's service to God. Thus, religious faith is the human search for a religious Absolute, i.e. the object of service and dedication of one's life; this faith is worship.

We are convinced that secularism is the key to understanding the character of the contemporary religious quest. Our claim is that this term is open, and one should approach it descriptively. It is a concept of mass thinking, not the product of a single philosophic school of thought. The word «secularism» loses little meaning when it is replaced with synonyms such as «secularization,» «worldliness,» «irreligion,» and «temporality.» It comes from the Latin word *saecularis*, which means «pertaining

to a given century or generation.» The use of the term gradually evolved into a definition of «freeing oneself/something from the influence of a church or religion»^[1].

The history of the secularization of Europe can be divided into two major periods. The Enlightenment initially laid the foundations of secularization, characterized by an anthropocentric cosmology with the human mind as the universal standard of knowledge, as well as cause-and-effect determinism, the belief in science and the inevitability of technological progress, and human self-sufficiency. Albert Camus referred to Feuerbach when displaying this new paradigm, calling it «a strange prophecy» where individualism was adopted in place of faith, reason in place of the Bible, politics in place of religion and the church, the world in place of heaven; where labor replaced prayer, poverty turned into hell on earth, and man replaced Christ^[2].

Modernity is primarily the twentieth century, during which period basically all the listed peculiarities of this worldview have been lauded to the skies and then rejected. The secular thinking of the twentieth century is marked by a need for a new cosmogony, by the consciousness of personal responsibility for the deterioration of the whole world, by disappointment, a lack of trust towards authorities, relativism, a need for deep relationships, and a striving to return to some basic values. It asserts the limits of reason and the need for faith and experience, the obsolescence of total determinism and acknowledges the existence of a Higher Being. It is obvious that:

...the crisis of technical, economic and mechanic progress results in the degradation of culture, the outcome of which is the crisis of Renaissance and modern humanism. Generally speaking, any cultural and historical epoch goes through a period of crises. Thus, the modern epoch is associated with a great metaphysical crisis since new sciences have undermined faith in philosophy. The crisis in physics led to the crisis of rationalism connected to a worldview change and the loss of its objectivity^[3].

Secularized thinking is a complex phenomenon caused by civilization's efficient achievement of a high technological level. Human beings are torn from nature and the soil by globalization and urbanization, and by massive industrial development. In contrast to the annual farming cycle, monotonous and constant industry turns a worker into a machine, making him impersonal, while yet propagating the ideas of human exclusivity and power.

On the other hand, the interpenetration of cultures and the transparency of democratic regimes introduce the intelligentsia to a number of approaches to solving identical problems. This creates an emphasis on multiplicity and ambiguity, which elicits among the intellectual elite (and not only them) division, doubts that the world can be cognitively studied, and faith in the uniqueness of personal life choices and in the right to act upon the judgments of one's conscience. Both tendencies deprive human beings of any kind of Absolute beyond the self, thereby concentrating the search for truth (the search

^[1] Stele, G. *Secularization and the Challenges of Faith*//*A Journal of Theology*. — 2000. — № 3. — pp. 125–139.

^[2] Camus A. *Rebellious Man. Philosophy. Politics*.

Art. — M., 1990. — p. 230.

^[3] Ogorodnik I., and Ogorodnik V. *A History of Philosophic Thought in Ukraine*. — K., 1999. — p. 470.

that is a constant need of the soul) on the self. The modern human path is one of personal opinion which, strange as it may seem, is formed more and more inextricably by external factors, i.e. by society (such as by advertising). And that is not the least of it. Contemporary men and women, misled and suffering defeat in their undertakings, suddenly grasp that not everything depends on them; they are not the be-all and end-all, and civilization is not all-powerful. The sense of security that is essential to the human personality disappears. It cannot be denied that this is the mood of our time.

Therefore, secularization is the inevitable path of the development of civilized society. Any country or culture that gives free access to education simultaneously opens the door to doubt, confidence in human power, and a certain freedom from religious influence. The positive features of religious faith begin to be regarded as leftovers of a bygone era and all attention is turned instead to the alternatives presented by secularized society. But what are the alternatives and where do they lead?

One should not, however, equate secularization with atheism or, for example, Marxism. At first glance, secularization is a neutral process in relation to religious faith; it does not eliminate a religious beginning, but «sanctifies» nonreligious values and goals. Worldliness «frees» humanity from the influence of God, but at the same time creates emptiness and the need to know the meaning of life and relate to people. Thus, «a secular man is not an atheist, but the one who does not consider it urgent to practice one's religion on a daily basis.»^[4]

^[4] Paulin, G. *Biblical Truth in the Modern World*. – Zaoksky, 2001. – p. 46.

The Enlightenment replaced the medieval «God-king-man» world model of the universe with the «man-environment» model. All terms defining the «refined» supernatural world are extrapolated into the worldly phenomena. Therefore, the term «spirituality,» which used to refer to the realm of one's relationship with God, now defines human giftedness or creativity.

One of the foundational elements here is the understanding of religiosity as true humaneness, as high humanism. Anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism characterize our era. «Man is the measure of all things» is the principle that now applies to the religious realm. Individualism leads to the extreme subjectivity of religious feeling and to heathenism. «God still lives in everyone's heart,» is a popular theology of today; therefore there is no need for formalized religious practice. In the realm of theology one can identify the rebirth of paganism and the modernization of fundamental Christian teaching. The dominance of secularism in the churches explains the development of liberalistic and eclectic thinking.

Thus, we observe that religious faith, worship-faith, is secretly rejected by secularism. From our perspective, this is caused by several factors.

First, secularism is a «convenient» alternative to a number of aspects of religious faith, as we see from the genesis of secularism. This convenience, however, does not stem from the psychological needs of an individual, but is inculcated by society as a contemporary analogue of hedonism. Religious faith interferes with a person living as he or she pleases. Secularism effectively turns a blind eye to the inevitable result of realized desires, be-

cause everything is relative and nothing is absolute. Thus, one is saved from the painful boomerang effect of one's own behavior, the results of which one either does not, or does not wish to know.

Second, while religious thinking proclaims that «God is the measure of all things» (Theo-centrism), and while the Renaissance has the motto «Man is the measure of all things (anthropocentrism), secularism proposes, «Man himself is the measure of things for himself,» thus locking an individual in his «private universe,» which ultimately exhausts itself.

As seen from experience, rejecting God as personal Savior in effect casts society back into a pre-Christian era of polytheism and mysticism. This brings to mind an interesting idea expressed by Paul Tillich that the One God of the Bible proclaims Himself the God of time, whose influence is impossible to ignore. He is the only cause of humanity's existence and an individual needs to make relationships right with Him. Pagan gods, on the contrary, are the gods of place, so their power is limited; it is well within human capability to buy them off or protect oneself through performing the proper manipulations. However, should the latter course fail, the human being is completely dependent on circumstances and falls under the tyranny of fatalism. The «shallowness» of the universe turns the human into a puppet in the hands of unpredictable powers. Thus, the first result of the «paganization» of life is the tyranny of fatalistic predetermination.

On the other hand, disappointment in God and humanity, extreme individualism, separates one from both past and future, locking one into the present («here and now») and attaching one to materi-

alism. Relativism, the absence of authority and a state of despair in this case may lead to yet another way of looking at life. If there is no Absolute, I will «squeeze» the maximum out of the «relative» no matter what it costs, and then I will elevate myself over my own destiny. Such, for example, is the warrior's way in the magical teaching of Carlos Castaneda. Moreover, the ideology of such a multidimensional and widespread «quasi-religious» (Tillich) movement as the «New Age» is permeated with the same worldview tendency.

Thus, the ultimate end of the secularist path begins to take on clearer features. The emotional demand for stimulation combined with the inward rejection of the pointlessness and uselessness of life, the demand for miracles and the ability to transcend the visible and material on the one hand, combined with the rejection of religion (primarily Christianity) on the other, results in mysticism that excites the imagination, yet postulates no moral standards. Then superstition, as a system of beliefs in a would-be cause-and-effect relationship, serves as a bridge or initiation path to mysticism. This belief is not simply the mark of ignorant people, but of a type of libertarian who does not care about the source of supernatural power, but only about the desired result (cf. the motto of Aleister Crowley, «Do whatever you want.»)

Relativism can also influence ethics. A secular man does not abide in the world of good and evil, but in the world of the gradation or merging of contrasts. The «shallowness» of the world causes the «shallowness» of human beings which, in turn, makes morality shallow as well. The worship of temporal success desensitizes a person to evil and its reflection in oneself,

other people and life. Such an attitude regarding the problem of evil rooted in superstition and mysticism will eventually bring one to a conscious worship of Satan.

Let us draw some conclusions. Secularism as a worldview is connected, among other things, with high technological achievements, and sees the world as governed by pluralistic thinking that pertains to the religious sphere as well. The religious innovations of modernity view religion as practical humanism, subjective and anthropomorphic piety and heathenism.

The «information boom» elevates reason and rejects religious faith. However, at this stage reason finds its limitations. Despite being puzzled at the complexity of the new model of the universe, the non-

religious person does not want to return to worship-faith, rather, his or her self-disillusion leads to pagan mysticism.

We would like to emphasize that secularism is a legitimate stage in the development of civilization and, figuratively speaking, it can be viewed as a condition where «positive factors call for negative consequences.» We cannot escape social consequences by creating «shortcuts» (such as banning education); the experience of medieval scholasticism proves this. But we are called to examine the level of secularization in our own lives and make a choice between worship-faith and superstition and not make ourselves captive in the prison of worshipping our own needs, whether noble or blasphemous.