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Metropolitan Luke (Andriy Kovalenko)

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CHURCH, STATE AND HUMAN IN THE PROCESS OF SECULARIZATION

By Metropolitan Luke (Andriy Kovalenko)

Metropolitan Luke (Andriy Kovalenko), PhD of Medical Sciences, PhD of Theological Sciences, ruling bishop of the Zaporizhzhia eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Research interests: Orthodox anthropology, Orthodox ecclesiology, bioethics, religious philosophy. E-mail: arhierey.zp@ukr.net ORCID: 0000-0001-7236-467X

Abstract

This article examines the processes of socio-cultural change under conditions of secularization. The conditions for the appearance of several secularization areas are considered, and the features of their formation and their current state are revealed. Analysis of the anthropological factor in the processes of secularization is carried out and its role in the process of desecularization is shown. Within the framework of secularization, there has been an expansion of the possibilities for a person to determine his or her understanding of the connection with God. As a result, a new socio-religious population stratum has formed: those who consider themselves believers, but do not affiliate with any existing religion. The research indicates that the formation of the “state-church-human” relationship in the process of secularization was directly dependent on the way church property was confiscated. In the Soviet Union, the economic base of the Church was destroyed in a short time. With the help of repressions against the clergy, the Church was also destroyed as a social entity of a new socialist society. The rapid and violent process characterizes a distinctly socialist model of secularization, different from the Western one. Depending on the secularization model, the formation of the public consciousness regarding religion has different results.

Key words: secularization, state, church, human, Soviet system, ideology.

Introduction

A characteristic of interaction between religious and social processes during the last few centuries is generally called secularization. This term though generally interpreted as “human liberation from the care of religious and metaphysical systems,”¹ actually describes quite complex and ambiguous processes of structural socio-cultural change. Initially, the secularization process took place only in the field of religion; it then spread to the spiritual and socio-cultural spheres of life. The theory of secularization developed strongly during the 20th

¹ Харви Кокс. *Мирской град: секуляризация и урбанизация в теологическом аспекте*. [The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective.] (Moscow: Восточная литература, 1995), p. 53.

century within religious studies, religious anthropology, sociology of religion, and theology. This has led to heated discussions and to the emergence of several interpretations of the meaning and extent of secularization.

Theories of Secularization

The first direction usually includes the *historical or historical-genetic approach*,² in which the study of the secularization processes begins with the definition of “secularization” in reference to the first documents in which this concept is mentioned. In particular, the definition of the concept of “secularization” can be derived from the concept of what is “secular,” something that “differs by its status or state from church and churchly.”³ In such a context, the concept of “secularization” was first used in political and legal aspects during the signing of the Peace Treaty of Westphalia (1648). In this document, the alienation of parts of church property as compensation for territorial losses to the Elector of Brandenburg was defined by the term *seculariser* (from *seculier*-worldly, secular).⁴

Within this approach, we can highlight the interpretation of secularization by Peter Berger in *The Sacred Canopy*, which has become classic. It argues that this process entails the liberation of different spheres of public life – namely politics, economics, culture, and education – from the influence of religion. In particular, he notes:

When we speak of society and institutions in modern Western history, secularization manifests itself in the evacuation by the Christian Church from those areas which previously were under its control or influence in the separation of Church and state, in the expropriation of church lands, in the emancipation of education from ecclesiastical authority. When we speak of culture and symbols, we imply that secularization is more than a socio-structural process. It affects the totality of cultural life and may be observed in the decline of religious contents in the arts, in philosophy, in literature. Moreover, it is implied here that secularization has a subjective side as well. As there is a secularization of society and culture, so there is a secularization of consciousness. Put simply, the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations.⁵

² Д.К. Безнюк. “Секуляризация: опыт систематизации подходов в изучении.” *Социология*. [“Secularization: the experience of systematizing approaches to learning”. *Sociology*]. 2009. URL: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/290216947.pdf>.

³ Ю. Ю. Медведева. “Секуляризация та зміна функцій релігії в сучасному суспільстві.” [“Secularization and changing the functions of religion in modern society.”] *Sociology*, 2016 № 1. Pp. 101-110.

⁴ Безнюк. *op. cit.*, . URL: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/290216947.pdf>.

⁵ П. Бергер. *Религия и проблема убедительности* [перевод из книги: Berger, P. *The Sacred Canopy*. New-York, 1967]/*Неприкосновенный запас* [*Religion and a Problem of Persuasiveness*.” translation from the book: Berger, P. *The Sacred Canopy*. New-York, 1967/*Iron Rations*], 2003, №6 (32) URL: <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2003/6/berger.html>.

As a result, religious ideas began to lose persuasiveness among the general public, and religious symbols ceased to be signs of identity and social integration. Religion also lost some of its status as a catalyst, as there was a radical change in the attitude regarding religion, or religious experience in which it can be possible, according to Professor O. I. Predko, to change the “worldview orientations of man[,] thanks to which man has the opportunity to know their hidden depths.”⁶

Another interpretation of secularization is conditionally called *structuralist*.⁷ This approach directly studies the types and forms of secularization and determines the prospects of religion. Authors, such as P. Berger, B. Wilson, T. Lukman, N. Luhmann, and T. O’Dea, posit that secularization is an irreversible process that steadily decreases the scope of religion, to the extent of a progressive decline in or disappearance of institutionalized religion.

In the context of religious and theological research on the processes of secularization, the understanding of the interaction of the church-state-human triad acquires an important role. In the works of Max Weber, Brian Wilson, Peter Berger, Thomas Lukman, and Karel Dobbeler, this interaction is examined through the sociological lens. Due to the vagueness of the definition of secularization, the final, generally accepted usage of this term was formed by these scholars rather slowly. As Jose Casanova notes: “European sociologists tended to see two meanings of the term internally interconnected because they reflect two realities – the deprivation of religious institutions of their importance in society and the disappearance of religious beliefs and practices among individuals – as structure related components of the overall modernization process.”⁸ In the monograph *Вододіли секуляризації. Західний цивілізаційний проєкт і глобальні альтернативи* (“Water makers of secularization. The western civilization project and global alternatives”), it is noted that

Soviet researchers were also inclined to recognize secularization as a process involving both social and individual consciousness. In turn, American religion sociologists, according to Casanova, tended to refer to the term “secularization” only in the second aspect, that is to recognize secularization only at the level of individuals without treating secularization as a political or social phenomenon.⁹

⁶ О. І. Предко. “Релігійний досвід: особистісний вимір” [“Religious Experience: The Personal Dimension.” (*Sofia*)]. (Софія: гуманітар.- реліг. вісн./ Київ. нац. ун-т ім. Т. Г. Шевченка ; голов. ред. Є. А. Харьковщенко. Київ/Київ. ун-т, 2014). №1. Рр. 21-25.

⁷ Безнюк, *op.cit.*, URL: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/290216947.pdf>.

⁸ J. Casanova. “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective” *The Hedgehog Review*. 2006. Spring & Summer. pp. 7-22.

⁹ *Вододіли секуляризації. Західний цивілізаційний проєкт і глобальні альтернативи*: [монографія] [*Water makers of secularization. Western Civilization Project and Global Alternatives*: [monograph]]/ (Kyiv: Український інститут стратегій глобального розвитку і адаптації. ФОП Халіков Р.Х., 2017, р. 9.

The authors of the monograph believe that “the second definition is quite problematic,” based on Charles Taylor, who proposed “to replace such understanding of secularization where individuals from compulsory faith go to its complete absence by that where individuals from compulsory faith go to faith as one of the possible options.”¹⁰ That is, there is a critique by these authors of the simplified definition of secularization theory. This is logical because the changes in the relationship between church and state necessarily affected religious consciousness, both in its social and individual dimensions.

Defining the role of the anthropological factor in secularization processes helps to clarify and explain a certain ‘fiasco’ of this phenomenon of secularization and the beginning of the desecularization processes. At the same time, secularization processes have arguably “expanded” the boundaries of the possible in terms of how one personally relates to the supernatural, to God. In addition to the believer and atheist, a rather broad social stratum has formed, comprised of people who have spiritual interests but are outside of religion. Here it is possible to identify two types of people. The first is characterized by indifference toward religious issues, that is, ignoring religion. The second is defined by personal explanation of the supernatural, which is marked by an eclectic approach – belief in the existence of the supernatural without any reference to existing religious systems.

Another direction in the development of secularization theory is represented by scholars, such as American sociologists T. Parsons and R. Bellah, who claim that secularization refers only to a change in the role of religion in society. Exhausted forms of religion are replaced by new ones, but religion continues to exist. Secularization is regarded as a normal, healthy cultural process that can even increase the influence of religion in its renewed models.

According to Parsons, societies develop through differentiation. In this way, religion loses the status of “sacred image,” turns into one of multiple spheres of social life, and becomes an increasingly personal matter. At the same time, this does not indicate in any way the loss of its significance for the individual and society. Religion only to a lesser extent directly affects the economic, political, socio-cultural, educational spheres of life. Parsons also proposes that these processes have a positive effect on personal faith, which, freed from the ideological pressure of the church, becomes more significant.¹¹

In his analysis of secularization processes, Parsons emphasizes transformations in the concept of the sacred. In particular, he writes of how, in previous societies, the sacred

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹ Т. Парсонс. “Общий обзор,” *Американская социология. Перспективы. Проблемы. Методы*. [“Overview”, *American Sociology. Perspectives. Problems. Methods*.] (Moscow: 1972), pp. 360–378.

played an important role in individual, social and institutional practices; he cites the Reformation and the Renaissance as examples of this in European history, freeing the world from domination by the sacred. According to Parsons, we can expect the disappearance of the sacred in general. The only sphere where its influence may remain is in the personal and private sphere.¹² Highly appreciative of the role of Christianity in the formation processes of Western civilization, Parsons considers the Christian paradigm to be the center of morality for the modern European person. Modern person lives in a social system that has absorbed Christian ideas and values and is under their direct and indirect influence. A modern European, consciously, or unconsciously, verifies their actions according to Christian ethics and is influenced by Christian culture. Thus, Parsons assumes that the decline of church-centered religiosity can lead to the emergence of new forms of religion and new forms of religiosity, according to the needs of modern humans.¹³

Similar views are shared by Bellah. In his view, the modern Christian is a “secularized Christian” who lives in a modern world that is, to some extent, a world without God. The human world, filled with the ordinary and profane, is one in which a person takes responsibility for solving all of their problems, and for their own successes and failures. As a person continues to seek the meaning of their existence within new horizons, his or her new view of the world can yet be deeply religious.

Bellah emphasizes that with the increasing complexity of social organization, religion is evolving; during this process it shows its capacity to not only strengthen existing social structures, but to also promote the further development of an otherwise secular society by changing existing norms and values. Later stages of religious evolution indicate its growing autonomy in relation to a given social environment and influence on social development.¹⁴ Hence the conclusion: the process of secularization does not lead to the destruction of religion, but rather to a change in its structure, place, and role in the human world.¹⁵

Thus, the main features of secularization in the modern world are the liberation of the human mind from theological dogmas and prohibitions, and the liberation of the human conscience from violence in the choice of worldview and beliefs. In this context, secularization

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Р.Белла. “Религия как символическая модель, формирующая человеческий опыт” in Р. Белла. *Религия и общество : хрестоматия по социологии религии: Учеб. пособие для вузов / сост. В. И. Гараджа [и др.].* [“Religion as a symbolic model shaping human experience”. *Religion and Society: a chrestomathy on the Sociology of Religion: Study aid for universities*] (Moscow: Аспект Пресс, 1996), pp. 115–118.

¹⁵ Ibid.

is interpreted by a number of sociologists as 1) a profound movement in human thinking, 2) an overcoming of mythology, 3) an affirmation of the scientific worldview, and 4) an evolution of religion and its modifications throughout social changes. In this way, one of the popular modern theories of secularization lies in the assertion that it involves a change in religion, but not a decline or even reduction of its significance.

Features of the Secularization Processes in Different Types of Societies

The study of the secularization processes in the interaction of “state-church-human being” points to several models of secularization. These depend on multiple factors: the form of alienation of church property, on the formation of a new social consciousness in its relation to religion, and so on. Considering the organization of societies into socialist and capitalist camps, as well as socio-cultural, political, and economic features of the development of capitalism, one can distinguish between a *socialist* model of secularization, a *Western European*, and an *American*.¹⁶ Depending on the model of secularization, the influence on the formation of public consciousness about religion occurs in quite different ways and with different results.

The Socialist Model of Secularization

The *socialist* model of secularization is inherent in the countries of the socialist camp and is determined by a clear ideology of the state to form a certain type of personality, the characteristic feature of which is secular consciousness. In fact, the conscious and purposeful formation of an atheist human was carried out in the socialist states. This model is characterized by deep interference into the private sphere of a person, often by way of violence.

In the countries of the socialist camp – most prominently, the Soviet Union – the onset of scientific atheism had a “high” goal. According to Marxist teaching about the change of historical social formations, the Soviet people necessarily had to accept communism. This idea, taking into account the peculiarities of public consciousness formation, in which religious faith was replaced by unquestioning faith in the Communist Party, was a kind of secularized Christian eschatology. In fact, as Nikolai Berdyaev noted, Marxism is “the secularization of the ancient Jewish messianic consciousness.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Originally the author included extensive analyses of the Western European and American models of secularization in his manuscript which were omitted for the sake of the specific interests of the readership of OPREE.

¹⁷ Н.А. Бердяев. *Истоки и смысл русского коммунизма*. [The origins and meaning of Russian communism.] (Moscow: Наука, 1990), 222 pp.

In the process of forming a new type of person – the Soviet man – an important role was played by the displacement of the religious worldview, which is known to be based on the vertical and horizontal transcendence of the supernatural. In the vertical transcendence an important role is played by a human's personal faith in God; in the horizontal transcendence, eschatological ideas and awareness of the sanctity of the church's social structure play a role. Based on the success of these long established concepts in the public mind, the new ideology of socialism was proposed to society, displacing the religious worldview (the principle of faith in the divine was transformed into the principle of faith in a socialist leader), in order to form the "Soviet man."

Although, in the early twentieth century, the church was largely integrated into the body of the state system as one of the ministries under the emperor, the separation of state and church was carried out rapidly based on Soviet government decrees. The first piece of legislation was the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars "On the Separation of Church from State and School," proclaimed in January 1918. The decree guaranteed freedom of conscience, while at the same time depriving persons of the right to evade civic duties based on religious beliefs, justifying the transfer of civil status acts and disposal of church property to secular authorities, depriving the Church of state subsidies, and so on. According to paragraph 9 of this Decree, school was separated from church and the teaching of religious subjects was prohibited.¹⁸

These acts had both social and individual ramifications. At the societal level, the state was rapidly becoming secular, depriving the church of all social functions and giving it the status of a voluntary association. With the aim of displacing the Church from public and social significance, the government created a liquidation department under the People's Commissariat of Justice to implement the program of separating the Church from the state. Their efforts involved the destruction of the economic base of the Church, the intensification of anti-religious propaganda, and the repression of the clergy; the plan was to destroy the Church as a social entity in a new socialist country. Taking into account these measures, the government managed to achieve this goal fairly quickly at the legal level, which indicates the efficacy of *legal secularization* in the process of separating the Church from the state.

In Ukraine, the "Decree on the Separation of Church from State and School from Church" launched a radically new type of church-state relationship, which required more

¹⁸ Декрет Тимчасового робітничо-селянського уряду України "Про відокремлення церкви від держави і школи від церкви" від 19 січня 1919 [Decree of the Provisional Workers 'and Peasants' Government of Ukraine "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church of January 19, 1919"], in 3 архівів ВУЧК–ГПУ–НКВД–КГБ – № 1/2(24/25). К., 2005. Pp. 41–42.

complex and painstaking work to separate the religious role models of “Soviet human” worldview from the scientific. That is why the task was to deprive both the younger generation and “the Soviet human” (adults) in general, regardless of age, of religious education. It was assumed that because of the systematic formation of a scientific social consciousness, religion as a social phenomenon would disappear in history. In these processes, *legal secularization* was replaced by *ideological secularization*, a powerful factor in worldview transformation.

Powerful actions by the authorities played an important role in the processes of ideological secularization. Unlike legal secularization, which took place over a relatively short period of time from 1918 to 1925, ideological secularization faced numerous anthropological difficulties, and continued, though on a much smaller scale, until the early 1980s.

In relation to the processes of vertical and horizontal transcendence of human beings to the supernatural, the new ideological system succeeded in supplanting religion on the horizontal level, replacing eschatological religious hopes with faith in the ideals of the communist future. These processes, although effective, considering the peculiarity of the phenomenon of religious faith, did not take easily, namely due to the lack of direct reference to a supernatural beginning of life. Vertical level substitution proved to be much more difficult. In the minds of the general population, due to purposeful ideology, repressions, and social pressure, all of which limited individuality, (such as impossibility to build a career), vertical transcendence was destroyed. From preschool age and at all stages of the educational process, role models of the secular worldview were presented by way of every possible form of influence, from the media to art and literature.

In these processes, a new type of person was formed, in whom, at the level of horizontal transcendence, the belief in a bright communist future was fixed, and at the level of vertical transcendence, a cult of leaders was placed to whom it was necessary to adapt, because the declared role models did not correspond to reality. To some extent, a countercultural attitude among the general population to the rulers, established since the time of tsarist rule, also hindered it. Yuri Samarin, a Slavophile philosopher, eloquently describes the typical behavior of a peasant: “A wise peasant in the presence of his master pretends to be a fool, a truthful man lies unscrupulously directly in his eyes, an honest man robs him, and all three call him their father.”¹⁹ Thus, the cult of the leader proved insufficient to replace God, as faith in the latter was formed over the centuries, rooted in popular consciousness, and formed the basis of

¹⁹ Ю.Ф. Самарин. “О крепостном состоянии и о переходе из него к гражданской свободе.” [“About villainage and about the transition from it to civil freedom.”] URL: http://az.lib.ru/s/samarin_j_f/text_1854_o_krepostnom_sostoyanii.shtml.

worldviews about the meaning of human life, the afterlife, the understanding of good and evil, moral values, and so on. Consequently, a complete replacement at the vertical level was impossible, due to the incompatibility of meaningful dimensions of faith in God and the cult of the leader.

The transcendence inherent in the human spirit was usurped by the belief in the greatness of scientific and technological progress, in the greatness of the universe, and in the greatness of social space, which, in Taylor's words, was nothing more than an "immanent frame," the way of contextualizing secular individual existence in the secular space.²⁰ A characteristic feature of the new secularized consciousness became the understanding that all spheres of human existence (economic, political, cultural, educational, etc.) have no connection with God.

The essence of religious consciousness was not considered in the rapid pace of secularization. The deep inquiries of the human spirit about the meaning of being – eternal and temporary – were left unanswered. Therefore, first by the crisis of the cult of the leader (i.e., the cult of Stalin in the 50s), and then by the economic transformations of *perestroika*, the conditions for expanding worldviews were created. Religious faith, which had not been completely destroyed in the public consciousness of a new socialist citizen, at the same time, ceased to be something traditional but was rather based on primordial ideas about the role of God in the world of things and in the world of human beings. According to Taylor, secularization in such conditions creates an environment for the "existence" of faith in modern societies.

Thus, the characteristic features of socialist secularization are 1) purposeful and conscious withdrawal of the church's ideological and social function for a relatively short period of time, and 2) conscious and purposeful transfer of meanings to the social plane in order to form a new type of person.

Conclusion

Despite the diversity in the processes of religious and secular interaction, the modern human community, perhaps more than ever in history, demonstrates unity in its diversity. Almost all modern countries have a secular orientation, yet, taking into account demographic characteristics (today in poor countries the birth rate is higher than in developed countries), the

²⁰ Ч.Тейлор. *Секулярный век.* [Secular age.] (ББИ/Библейско-Богословский институт, 2007). 967 pp.

vast majority of people in the world adhere to traditional religious views; widening the gap between the religious and the secular affects world politics, in that context of increases the role of religion in international relations.

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