

Secularization - the promoter of ‘new type of man’

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ABSTRACT

Secularization is a phenomenon supposing major mutations on the social level. Thus, based on the principle of rationality, secularization has led to the removal of religion from the social sphere, the desacralization, aiming, ultimately, that the sacred disappear altogether from man's life. Within the globalizing-secularizing society, economics seeks to take possession of the entire social and spiritual life, helped by a policy-aggressive mercantile mentality. Secularization has led to manipulation of man so that he believes he has to build his future by abstaining from religion. The secularized man has come to the conclusion that only by his own forces helped by reason, economy and technology he can be the one who creates progress, namely perfection for himself and for the world he lives in. The hypermodern man is a man of ephemerality, a human being looking for his accomplishment in trifles, who no longer has deification as his final goal. The problems that man is facing today can be solved by taking the eternity as reference system for them.

Keywords: Orthodoxy; secularization; globalization; spirituality; hypermodernism; ethical relativism;

INTRODUCTION

The Orthodoxy and the Christian world, in general, are faced today with a moral-spiritual crisis making its presence felt in the society defined as hypermodernist and globalized, a crisis maintained by secularization.

Etymologically, the word “secularization” comes from the Latin “seculum”, which means “race, nation, generation, epoch, century (in the sense of long, undetermined duration)”, but also “spirit of the epoch, fashion of the time, worldly life”¹. Thus, the notion of *secularism*, *secularization* designates a phenomenon by which, on the level of mentalities, there appears an important mutation *in the spirit of the time* or *according to the fashion of the time*. Actually, this spirit and fashion of our times are tributary to “the lust of the body” and “the lust of the eyes” and “the pride of life” (1 John 2: 16), which constitute now absolute values and ideas. It is the type of society whose ideas and principles (with the pretense of “values” that must be universalized) are impregnated in today's human consciousness. Saint John the Evangelist has in view precisely this danger when he exhorts: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of possession - is not from the Father but from the world. The world is passing away with all its desires, but the one who does the will of God remains for all time.” (1 John 2: 15-17). The ideals of the secularized world, its principles radically differ from the

¹ G. Guțu, *Dicționar Latin-Român, Științifică și Enciclopedică*, București, 1983, p. 1082;

world built on the foundation of Christ's teachings, namely the world purified and transfigured by the work of the Holy Spirit, which will enjoy "a new earth and new heavens" in the age to come, as the Good God assures us (Revelation 21: 1-22: 5).²

1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SECULARIZATION PHENOMENON

The period of maximal theoretical preoccupation with the secularization phenomenon was that of the 1960s, when this phenomenon developed and took place very intensely. According to some specialists of that epoch, the crisis caused by the secularization of religion was irreversible, secularization being nothing else but the result of the rationalization process. It was believed that the phenomenon is irreversible and unstoppable, its results being the removal of religion from the social sphere, desecration, and then a total disappearance of the sacred from man's life. The public, influenced by the "scientific" theories of the specialists and of the media, was thinking that "modernity" would settle down in history as complete rationalization of the existence.

Today, globalization represents the most recent stage of Western modernity, with implications that are simply unpredictable for the entire mankind, due to the fact that the economic factor is trying to acquire dominion, with the help of its aggressive-mercantile mentality, on the entire social and spiritual life.

"Due to the fact that globalization is an effect of the economic developments, it has a secular nature, edified outside the living of faith."³

To move from a *market economy* to a *market society*, the human society is exposed to huge risks, which could trigger un-healable wounds for man's becoming in the world and his destiny in eternity. We see the economic factor triumphing over spirituality, the technique trying to drive aside culture, the politics taking no heed to Christian ethics and the body being given more importance than the soul.

"In essence, the discussion on the theme of secularization wants to express the fact that the ratio between religion and laity, between the orientation to a transcendent system of reference and immanent accomplishment has changed fundamentally in modern Europe."⁴

Secularization means the drifting away of man and of the society from the fundamental principles of Christian spirituality.⁵ All is reduced to the horizon of the earthly life, religion being no longer able to give legitimacy to the social and political order. Therefore, by "secularization" one can designate:

"the processes of laicization, namely of emancipation from under the authority of the religious area, appeared in the Occident starting with the period of dissolution of feudalism. This process involved the moving away of the spheres of science, social action and political power from the dominion or influence of the ecclesiastic institutions or of the symbolical-religious universes."⁶

² Pr. Ioan Bizău, *Viața în Hristos și Maladia Secularizării*, Patmos, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, pp. 62-63;

³ M. Vlad, "Globalizare și Religie", in *Renașterea*, Editată de Arhiepiscopia Ortodoxă a Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului, no. 6, iunie 2000, p.6;

⁴ Ulrich Ruh, "Europa și secularizarea: trăsăturile principale ale unui proces cu multe fațete", in *Un suflet pentru Europa. Dimensiunea religioasă a unui proiect politic*, Anastasia, București, 2005, p. 1;

⁵ Pr. lect. univ. dr. Mihai Himcinschi, *Misiune și dialog. Ontologia misionară a Bisericii din perspectiva dialogului interreligios*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2003, p. 134;

⁶ Arhimandrit lector univ. dr. Teofil Tia, *Reîncreștinarea Europei? Teologia religiei în pastorală și misiologia occidentală contemporană*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2003, p. 20;

Religion and morals are driven away from the public life, into the private life domain, technical solutions and public legislation becoming a substitute for moral consensus. Thus, public life comes under the dominion of secular legislation, bureaucracy, rationality and technology, and the private life domain comes under the dominion of the individual options.

Due to the artificial separation between public domain and private domain:

“religion being reserved to the second domain of existence, (...) the Western social, economic and political structures will take shape and will be expressed either outside the Church, or against it. Although religion is attributed the domain of private options, the majority of the individuals get to live their personal life in a secularized manner, without any religious interpretation of the existence.”⁷

2. THE SECULARIZED MAN - A “NEW TYPE OF MAN”

Speaking of secularization, we mean the laicization of society and culture so much that the Church and religion were excluded from human life. This vision of the Church and religion stated strongly by the philosophies of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, but began in the late thirteenth century by disputes between Boethius of Dacia and Siger of Brabant, who modified the relation between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy, between monks and intellectuals. More precisely, this report went from a phase of harmony to a phase of indifference, then of opposition.⁸ The report mentioned above followed an interesting route. In the first part of modernity, from Descartes to Hegel, the rationality was emphasized only because it was believed to be the key to all things, and therefore everything that pertained to faith, Church and Christianity was rejected. But, in Postmodernity, in the second part of modernity, the rationality has come to the conclusion that it is powerless, cannot answer the fundamental questions of mankind, and therefore appealed to the help of any religion or superstition, thus encouraging religious syncretism, resulting in the emergence of many sects. It should be noted that:

"the secularized man has changed his perspective on the history of mankind, in which he has not seen a history of God-directed salvation, but the initiative of men - secularized history has become the subject of scientific research. Liberated from any spiritual conditioning, the modern man thought he could build his future by ignoring religion. That's how appeared and developed earthly messianisms, the ideologies of the historical rise of societies - Hegelianism, positivism, Marxism, communism, fascism, etc. - who have brought many sufferings into the lives of people and societies."⁹

The secularized man is of the opinion that only by his own forces helped by reason, economics and technology can be the one who creates the progress, that is, his own perfection and the world in which he lives. Thus the role of the rationality was overestimated as the engine of the evolution of the world, reaching a linearity of Christian time without transcendence and sense. We meet enough people today who are struggling for progress, relying solely on rationality.

The hypermodern man turned into a disinterested being that nothing impresses him.

"Pleasure and profit are the only values that attract him. The hustle and bustle of modern man are only an endless and frightened run after sensations and useful. A look around us

⁷ Pr. Ioan Bizău, *Viața în Hristos și Maladia Secularizării*, p. 66;

⁸ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Wilhelm Dancă, “Creștinismul și provocările actuale”, interview conducted by Pr. Drd. Nicolae Răzvan Stan, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, anul LVIII, no. 5-8, 2006, p.134;

⁹ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Wilhelm Dancă, “Creștinismul și provocările actuale”, interview conducted by Pr. Drd. Nicolae Răzvan Stan, p. 135;

reveals only hurried beings, running under the pressure of an obsession for sensations and riches, or beings with tired faces of restraint, walking their passionate gaze over everything that might give them new and new sensations"¹⁰.

Another feature of today's man is the fact that he no longer has cultural roots, is the servant of a so-called "global culture" that alienates him and throws him into a mass of people who are chaotically guided by excessive consumerism. This man consumes a foreign culture of what he really is, that is, a man with a distinct identity and individuality, a citizen of a nation with certain customs and traditions, with a Christian morality that did not fail in the course of two millennia. We can talk about cultural consumerism, that is, about the consumption of cultural acts specific to other geographic areas, other traditions, other peoples formed over time. McDonalidization, the type of MTV or hollywoodian culture and other such excessively promoted cultures, only lead the man of today to a disastrous departure from the true culture, the "Holy Spirit" culture.

Contemporary man who lives in an ethical relativism, and can no longer understand what freedom is in reality:

"confuses the inner freedom with consensual permissiveness without ontological root, and comes to practice a tolerance based not on the full respect of the human person but on the conviction that all things have the same value, because nothing is absolutely true. The major risk to which the new man in the new secularized world is exposed is that this ideological consensus that serves as a norm turns into oppression and affirm that a "legal" thing is also a "moral" thing. Though it seems to be a tormented Prometheus, it shares the discouragement of Sisyphus or the egalitarian love of Narcissus swallowed by the waters, the contemporary man has never given up looking for a meaning for his life project."¹¹

One can see today a removal of religion from public life and its isolation in private life. The same happens in the case of the man who is separated, according to the pleasure of those who are interested, in the body (which becomes the object of the other) and the soul (autonomous subject). But, we must not forget that from the Christian point of view the separation between body and soul is erroneous, while man is both body and soul. The character of a human person involves the indissoluble and indestructible connection between body and soul, matter and form. Historians and sociologists of Christianity have identified three factors underlying the estrangement of the man of faith and mutilation and reduction only to the body: the spread of Anglo-Saxon puritanism at a geographical and cultural level, the emergence of "scientific dilemmas" in the second half of the eighteenth century and the exaggerated promotion of the culture of liberalism in the nineteenth century.

The secularized man, reducing everything to purely utilitarian value, is continually looking for comfort and pleasure, avoiding even the simplest forms of asceticism.

"As soon as he lives comfort, satisfied adaptation and the installation in his own comfy life, limited to the preoccupation of acquiring his material satisfaction, man, any man, loses his spiritual light, becoming, etymologically and actually, a civilized and comfortable animal."¹²

All these lead to the settling in of a true spiritual amnesia in the deepest area of conscience. This type of man proves to be indifferent both to God's existence and to the principles of life of the Evangel, showing an almost complete lack of interest to the religious problems, yet being fond of political and economic, sportive or mundane issues.

¹⁰ Constantin C. Pavel, *Tragedia omului în cultura modernă*, Anastasia, 1997, p.24;

¹¹ Constantin C. Pavel, *Tragedia omului în cultura modernă*, p. 136;

¹² H.-R. Patapievică, *Omul recent: o critica a modernității din perspectiva întrebării «Ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?»*, Humanitas, București, 2002, p. 137;

Chasing away the sacred from his life and his preoccupations, the secularized man produced a desecration of the Christian celebration by replacing it with conventional "feasts", which have a strictly consumerist, political, nationalist or playful character. Though not yet erased from the modern calendar, the ancient Christian celebrations have been emptied of their liturgical, sacred contents and have become "celebrations" for fun, physical relaxation, supplementary work in the family, or exaggerate consumption of material goods. Secularism makes man no longer feel the need to have God as his system of reference in all he does, since God would annul his liberty. This man, affected by the malady of secularism:

"no longer prays, feeling sufficient to himself; no longer has the eternity as his system of reference, being the prisoner of the moment; is no longer concerned by the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church because he no longer feels the need of holiness. He no longer accepts to take into account God's will and the natural laws by which the world's Creator and Custodian leads the creation towards its final target, having the conviction that the whole reality can be controlled and managed only based on laws elaborated by himself. One can say that we are dealing with a man belonging to a different anthropological type than the one understood for a long time by the European man. This new man lives as if God did not exist or is content with a diffuse, vague religiousness. And when he accepts a certain form of religiousness, he is only looking for comfort; a physical and psychic comfort that he would like to perpetuate infinitely."¹³

The secularized man no longer perceives salvation as an ontological restoration in Christ, but as a means of delivering stress by acquiring certain techniques and methods specifically created for that purpose. This explains the success of the numerous sects that sprouted into Christian space. Religion no longer represents, for the secularized man, the "way" of spiritual fulfillment and meeting with God, but only an "alternative technique" for harmonizing, developing, securing and welfare, without clear reporting to transcendence.

Speaking of "the last days", the Apostle Paul says that then:

"people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, braggarts, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, uncontrolled, untamed, not loving the good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, loving pleasure rather than loving God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power" (II Timothy 3, 1-5). This is also the portrait of the secularized man, "an instinctual man, selfish, unscrupulous, powerless, cowardly, servile, and avid of comfort, superstitious, slave of petty pleasures and of breaking news. The secularized man gradually loses control over his own interiority, which means that his intimacy is delivered to the outside and that he does not belong"¹⁴.

One must not forget the fact that:

"the secularization phenomenon has both positive and negative aspects. The Enlightenment, as engine of the secularization process, promoted very valuable ideas for the European civilization and culture, such as: the idea of nation, the idea of human rights, scientific and technological progress etc. Yet, the great shortcoming that secularization brings with it is the tendency to orient man more to the world down here than to the spiritual world"¹⁵.

Trying to drive man away from faith, from the spiritual world, secularization is dragging man into a spiritual void, a state in which he no longer has values and landmarks

¹³ H.-R. Patapievi, *Omul recent: o critica a modernității din perspectiva întrebării «Ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?»*, p. 82;

¹⁴ H.-R. Patapievi, *Omul recent: o critica a modernității din perspectiva întrebării «Ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?»*, p. 84;

¹⁵ Arhiepiscop Prof. Univ. Dr. Nifon Mihăiță, "Consumism și Globalizare – Provocări făcute credinței de cultura consumistă", in vol. *Spiritualitate și Consumism în Europa Unită*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2004, p. 214;

and this is why he becomes individualistic, with a weakened conscience, no longer wanting to take on responsibility for his own acts.

Among the effects of secularization on man and the society he lives in, one can enumerate:

- a diminution of the role of the Church in the daily life;
- a lower trust of man in the divinity;
- a degradation of the relations among people;
- encouragement of an excessive libertinage;
- a fragmentation of the traditional Christian family;
- an alteration of all the social structures;
- desecration of the Christian celebrations;
- imposing the symbol instead of the religious essence.¹⁶

One can find a man's removal from spiritual experiences, their repression, and their substitution with various surrogates borrowed from the various "religious" movements that have emerged on the background of secularization. Thus, the absolute man's thirst has been exploited by many charismatic spiritual leaders, adepts of some of the most eccentric spiritual forms, who take advantage of the lack of discomfort in which people today are. We are urged to lead a life based on excessive consumption of material things, the consumerism becoming in the vision of postmodernity and hypermodernity the standard of good living. We are taught that if we do not have the material comfort indicated by the ads that abound and suffocate our lives, then we can consider ourselves and we are considered by our peers to be the "pariah" of the society in which we live. The man is valued according to the material possibilities, according to the accounts he has in the bank and the way he spends his money on them, and not on the virtuous or sinful way of living his life. In fact, man's consciousness has been so suffocated by the shambles brought by secularization that he can no longer encompass God.

In secular society, man lost God and replaced him with what the fashion of the time offered him, the secular spirit, and that to be an integral part of society, in order to resemble the peoples, to be liked by them, or rather to be tolerated, and not to bother them with things related to Christian spirituality and to disturb their lives with no reference to the transcendent or to the eternal dimension of the human being. Christians must struggle to stop the phenomenon of secularization because they bear most of the responsibility for its consequences because they are tempted by the "spirit of time," and are easily accommodated to the "standards" of a world that accepts to live only in the plan of earthly life.

3. THE ORTHODOXY – THE CHANCE OF SALVATION FOR THE SECULARIZED MAN

To the present human society, conquered by the principles of the market economy, the Orthodoxy needs to offer the viable solutions it has available, yet which it needs to apply taking into account the present context. Of course, there have already appeared positive results thanks to the efforts made by the Orthodox Church, and one can feel a deepening of the faith, which had a positive impact especially among the young.

Although in the social environments one can feel a true rebirth of the authentic Orthodox faith, one cannot mask or minimize the absence of spirituality on a large scale, this spirituality having been replaced by forms of pseudo-spirituality coming from the West or

¹⁶ Ștefan Iloaie, *Relativizarea valorilor morale. Tendințele eticii postmoderne*, Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 23;

imported from the East. One can also add the scourge of the sects that have invaded the Orthodox environments, causing confusion and unrest. Orthodox minds today preserve the "key" values of the market economy culture - success, safety, competition, profit and social condition - "values" detached from everything that means Orthodox ethos through the fact that they no longer have evangelical inspiration.¹⁷

We, the Orthodox, need to be aware that secularization, though born and having acquired ample proportions especially in the Occident, affects us and this is why we should take steps towards stopping this scourge. And how could we counteract the damaging effects of secularization if not by an authentic Christian life, at the same time ascetic and sacramental, prophetic and community-based, with the deep capacity of happily assimilating the positive experiences of the modern culture while eliminating, at the same time, its deviations. The Orthodoxy has the possibility to give a chance of true living to the world around us by the power of its mighty weapons: the Evangel, the Liturgy, the Philocaly, the Icon and, last but not least, the Holy Fathers. Yet, to venture in the just fight, it must evaluate with discerning heart and wisdom the evil produced by secularization, to elaborate afterwards a coherent strategy, because it is only in this way that the weapons enumerated will bring fruit.

Let us not forget that one of the unhappy consequences of secularization is the fact that Europe runs the risk of no longer recognizing its roots, and this is happening because the European man no longer acts according to the Christian principles.

The Orthodox Church is the perfect keeper of the treasure received as heritage from Jesus Christ, her Savior and Leader, a treasure enriched during the epoch of the persecutions and the Ecumenical Synods by so many martyrs who have testified for the faith and Holy Fathers. The Orthodoxy is the one perfectly expressing the authentic communion of man with God. It is in this light that we must see the overwhelming importance of the Orthodoxy in a world increasingly ruined by secularization, a world that needs a return to the true values with and by the help of the Orthodox morals and spirituality.

In the context of the spiritual confusion the contemporary man is sinking in, the Orthodoxy offers the possibility of being the binder between the contemporary civilization and its traditional roots, without diminishing or altering its basic components. The Orthodoxy always makes this solution by its pan-Orthodox approaches for a better coordination of its common testimony, which it highlights in dialogue not just with the rest of the Christian world, but especially with the monotheist religions (Judaism and Islam) in order to promote a larger collaboration and to face together man's and the world's contemporary problems.

The place of the Orthodoxy in the secularized society of our days is defined by the role it has, namely of ministering to the contemporary man, a ministry not limited to arid theory inspired by its patristic tradition but manifested by the implementation of this tradition to face the heavy problems of our contemporary world.

CONCLUSIONS

We can characterize the secular world as a space in which sacredness and spirituality are no longer included, where man is encouraged to live as dictated by "the desire

¹⁷ Christos Yannaras, *Adevărul și Unitatea Bisericii*, trad. rom. Ierom. Ignatie Trif și Uliniuc Ionuț Dumitru, Sophia, București, 2009, p. 54;

of the flesh, the desire of the eyes", where the "the pride of possession" is valued, and humility, prudence, temperance are considered non-values.

The secularized man, de-spiritualized and desacralized, guides his steps according to the "spirit of the age" and "the fashion of time". The criteria for guiding people's personal lives have radically changed: convenience is the one that bases most of all the actions that the secularist man does. There is no longer a reference to the values of spiritual life, to what remains in eternity. In fact, the man of this age shapes his existence only by referring to the ephemeral, for which he will pay here, will accumulate the "passing ones", having only the false impression that he has acquired what he needs, that he is happy and fulfilled. The personal and social life of this new type of man revolves around the ephemeral.

The Christian, the man having the eternity for his perspective, following the way inspired by the moral-Christian teachings, desiring spiritual enrichment, that man moving along the horizontal axis of life always taking into account its transcendental level, has the capacity to re-orient the secularized man as well, to move the economic, the political and the social level of life according to the vibrant rhythms of the celestial music. The problems that man is facing today can be solved by taking the eternity as reference system for them.

The immediate, the ordinary, the comfortable, namely the ideals and the ephemerality specific of the secularizing norms find their solution in embracing the Christian-Orthodox spirituality, in the profound anchoring in the Church. The latter, by virtue of the loving communion uniting her and which she promotes, has the capacity of transforming the contemporary man into a being able to face all the challenges coming from secularization.

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