

PREFACE

The human awareness of social appartaining has deep biological and social roots. The alienated individual, on his own, is of no significance and is not a human in the real sense of the word, unless he becomes a member of any group, reaches a social position and his own place within the system of relationships. In contrast to the political parties, which are a relatively new phenomenon, the religiosity represents a universal social phenomenon. Hardly any civilization of significance does not have a certain religious component incorporated within itself or has not been based on it.

Evaluating the claims of the secularization story, we face several unresolved questions:

1. Is the suppression of religion limited to the area of Europe and is the narrative of secularization at the same time an attempt to present the European experience to the rest of the world.
2. Are religious beliefs being comprehensively suppressed and people becoming less religious, or are we dealing with new forms of religiosity, where new models of religious beliefs and practices are emerging that replace the old/traditional ones?
3. Has the religiosity of people not decreased and what has been achieved with the process of secularization. Is this a change in the social role of religion? Secularism is not the suppression of religion but an aspect of the weakening of religious authority.

The entanglement of politics in religion can lead to problems in society that arise as a result of politicized religion; to confessional homogenism and ideologized religion; to fanaticism that can end in terrorism against religious dissenters. In modern multicultural and multi-confessional societies, such an alliance between religion, religious communities and politics could lead to an increase in inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions and open opportunities for open clashes and conflicts between members of different ethnic and religious groups.

Modern globalization trends are a precondition for a situation in which the interaction between different religious and ethnic groups has increased. Unlike before when peoples, cultures, states and civilizations were more or less isolated from each other, today they inevitably influence each other. Such intense interaction can lead to two opposite effects. On the one hand, the danger of clashes between different ethnic and religious groups that are now in the same society is greater because it is a precondition for misunderstanding and hostility. On the other hand, all the closer contacts between different cultures and religions can lead to a reduction of the differences between them and thus reduce the danger of conflicts.

A hallmark of the new, global right-wing populisms has been the bid to capture religious constituencies. The strategy is one of harnessing the emotive solidarities and conservative values which often characterize religious communities to the steed of ethno-religious nationalism. This pattern is evident from engagement of evangelicals in the Americas, to the vilification of religious "others" by populists from Poland and Hungary to Turkey and India. And while the leaders of populist movements arguably act out of opportunism as much as conviction, their conjuring of ethno-religious passions has culminated in exclusionary legislation and pogroms against religious, ethnic, and gender minorities. But even as right-wing populism relies on demonizing dualisms, its global scope undermines the binary frames we all too often use to read world politics. After all, scholars and policymakers alike tend to presume that pluralist democracy is to be found in the Global North and West, while illiberal and authoritarian regimes are situated in the Global South and East.

Ultimately, by honing in on right-wing populism as an anti-pluralist attempt to politicize religion everywhere, we also open our minds to prospects for interfaith coalitions for pluralism. There is simply no *a priori* reason why the religiously informed political mobilization that runs through all our societies should be exclusionary. From Daoist and Hindu notions of relationality to the Jesuit principle of radical hospitality, all faiths endorse a variant of the golden rule: empathetic reciprocity towards vulnerable counterparts. In practice, moreover, inclusive political movements have long drawn spiritual sustenance and organizational capacity from religious sources.

If the state institutions in the vast majority of countries are organized secularly, on the well-known principles of separation, religion has not left the public space, nor the space of basic human needs. Nor can it ever be “locked” into the realm of the exclusively private and personal. If modernity has seemingly greatly shifted the position of the sacred from the focus of modern man, from his everyday life and from life’s priorities, on the other hand, it simultaneously awakened a rebellion against secularization and the need for the renewal of spiritual life. When, they are not reduced to only the private, spirituality and sacredness inevitably remain political references. Although religious institutions do not have the power to make legally binding decrees and decisions, a large number of European and North Atlantic political actors proclaim their support for the defense of Christian values. In the Islamic world it is even more unequivocal. It is a fact that religious institutions around the world have an increasing influence on social trends, and the cultural and value determinants towards which even some of the leading countries are oriented. The fact is that for some of these countries, this connection between religion and the state has existed since their founding, and that the degree of participation of the church’s influence in the state apparatus and its institutions has only varied. From the messages on the one-dollar bill to the oath on the Bible in judicial practice and the presence of the cross in, on and around most social institutions in the public space, which should be in the function of all citizens, we encounter the continuity of the presence of dominantly “domestic” religions in conjunction with the apparatuses of collectivity, even of those states that we consider the flagship of “advanced” Western civilization. It would be difficult for an objective eye to determine the existence of any serious difference in the treatment of “religious others”, which is presented in the public space, by comparing Western democracy and societies conceived on, for example, the Islamic state-legal tradition.

Today, these two different authorities are generally known in the Christian world as “church” and “state”. The first concerned with the matters of faith and the other with the matters of politics. Throughout the history of Christendom, the two have always been there, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in conflict, at times one dominant, at times the other, but always two authorities: one representing the imperium (the imperial power), and the other representing the priestly power. Following the Reformation and the Enlightenment, this doctrine of separation gained almost unanimous acceptance across the Western Christian world. The main problem between Western and Islamic model is the different visions of human rights. While Western countries consider the theory of human rights as anthropocentric, according to Islam the basis of human rights is the *Shari’a*, i.e., a theocentric model.

In contrast to Abrahamic traditions, where the conflicts emerged over the true God and the correct reading of transcendent truth, in China the conflict emerged over who had the right to access the will of Heaven. While the imperial state succeeded in co-opting and containing the elite traditions’ right to such access, notions of alternative means to access to achieve transcendence were driven underground where they were disguised in cultural forms which were accommodative and resistant. As a result, in the religious, cultural and political realm, the fault line in Chinese civilisations emerged as one between the state-elite versus popular culture. Modern Buddhism has responded to the challenges posed by secularist forces and agnosticism, atheism, and humanism in various ways. There are some secular Buddhists who are concerned with some of the trends and aspects of secular Buddhism and mindfulness programs. They fear that some forms of secular Buddhism may simply become a form of convenient or ‘easy’ Buddhism. The secularization of Buddhism has had a significant impact in Western and other societies. Those that are drawn to this approach to Buddhism do so because it aligns well with the secularization of life that is pervasive in Western culture. Equally important, they believe that it addresses concerns that arise out of living in the contemporary world: how to find happiness, peace, and meaning in a complex, confused, conflictual, and congested world.

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