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The Return of Religion to Philosophical and Cultural Discourse: Introduction to the Problem

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The article focuses on the analysis of leaving and return processes of religion to philosophical and cultural discourse. Different philosophers and theologians have expressed different opinions on such definitions as crisis of religion, secularization and post-secularization or religious pluralism, that are very important and filled with meaning nowadays. Because of the mass migration and religious conflicts, religion and religious pluralism are mostly being studied in the context of such tendencies as the growth of the fundamentalism and the multicultural or multi-religious communities. The article concentrates on the evolution of theories, concepts and approaches of such famous researchers on religion as Karen Armstrong, Zygmunt Bauman, Peter Berger, Harvey Cox, John D. Caputo, David Harvey, Paul Heelas and others. The new image of secularization and religious pluralism in the global world, the post-secular age tendency, the sense and marks of religion deconstruction provide us with the answer to the question whether such processes as leaving and return of religion to philosophical and cultural discourse really exist. The article is only the introduction to the issue that will be followed by the analyses of such important subject matters as language of religion as tool for philosophy and theology communication and a new image of religious borders today.

Key words: deconstruction of religion, modernity and postmodernity, post-secularization, religion, religious pluralism, secularization.

“If modernization has meant secularization, the word postmodern, if it means anything, inevitably means “postsecular”. Intellectually, Enlightenment critique produces the critique of Enlightenment, and this opens up the door to a renewed reflection upon religion in a post-Enlightenment way”.

John D. Caputo

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to determine whether such processes as leaving and return of religion to philosophical and cul-

tural discourse exist. The course of reaching the answer to this question is not simple since different philosophers and theologians have divergent opinions on such definitions as “crisis of religion”, “secularization”,

“religious pluralism”. Yves De Maeseneer raises such questions: “How to speak about transcendence today? How to represent the transcendent in the context in which God seems to have no place anymore? Neither a philosopher of religion nor a theologian can avoid this fundamental question. And not a few of them end up being paralyzed by its enormous weight”¹. Liberal, democratic, socialist, feminist political forces share the admission that modern states are secular and require a strict constitutional, legal, political and cultural separation of state from religion. In political philosophy, there has been clear and precise agreement on principles of tolerance, religious freedoms and neutrality with regard to religions. Many theories that are related to modern societies look at secularized states as something granted from the outside. It has been considered that secularized modern society requires a complete separation of religion from all other functionally differentiated social systems and particularly from the political system and the state. This famous hypothesis has never been challenged in the West before, but nowadays it started to show gaps that are more serious. The hypothesis that all religious activities will be limited to private life is contradicted by their recent prevalent presence in the public life.

For David Harvey, modernity was “secular movement that sought the demystification and desacralization of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate

human beings from their chains”². He viewed postmodern condition as a “new way of being-in-time/space, as it were”³. Continuing this idea, Kevin J. Vanhoozer wrote that religion is a candidate to “more repressed Other”⁴.

Because of mass migration and the ethnic and religious conflicts the religious pluralism is mostly being studied in the context of such tendencies as the growth of the fundamentalism and the multicultural and multi-religious communities. In many European countries, the Christian church is associated with a number of cultural, aesthetic and political traditions that are still practiced and valued, and these traditions make the significant part of European cultural heritage.

The New Image of Secularization and Religious Pluralism in the Global World

Under the conditions of globalisation, religious and cultural pluralism objectively becomes the ground, which is the most favourable for prosperity of the global social, cultural and moral tendencies. Interdisciplinary study as a critical theory underlines occupies a principle position. Philip Sheldrake emphasizes that a critical theory that derived from French philo-

2 Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 13.

3 Ibid., p. VIII.

4 Vanhoozer Kevin J. 2003. Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: a report on knowledge (of God). *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–26, p. 16.

1 *God out of Place? A Symposium on L.P. Hemming's Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God*. 2005. Edited by Yves De Maeseneer. Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, p. 8.

sophers influenced by social analysis, has had a growing impact on religious thinking in the West. “The recent breakdown of these closed systems of study and interpretation has also underlined that the ways we think about what we are studying or reading are complex and are also inevitably bound up with power issues”⁵. At the same time comparativistic and cross-cultural perspectives give us the possibility to look at religions from the point of view of asymmetrical hierarchies between spirit and body, subject and object, reason and matter, transcendence and immanence. According to this approach and methods, pluralism is not an ideology, but rather the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences. In addition, religious and cultural pluralism is not only the system of various values, acting under the banner of religions and culture in its various modifications; it also has the secular tendency. In international research, there is a growing awareness of the importance of religion for understanding the globalization. Yet, there is a disagreement concerning what specific role religion has in connection with this. The dynamic and dialectic connection between globalization and religion is a subject of serious research examinations. The cultural, religious and social distinctions become more and more appreciable inside the same community, however, at the same time direct or indirect pressure puts force on these communities to remain national and monoreligious.

5 Sheldrake, Philip. 2014. *Spirituality: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London / New York: Bloomsbury, p. 26.

In present philosophy, the concept of cultural consequences of globalization and religious pluralism refers to the standpoint that the world may be interpreted in several ways. In ethics and normative sociology, it refers to the problem that modern society is no more based on an authoritative set of norms, so that all ethical questions are, following the terminology of Jurgen Habermas, “subject to open-ended and rational discourse”.

In political discussions about pluralism it may refer to multiple political parties, to the decentralization of the state apparatus, or to the distribution of power resources in society. In economic and sociological theory inspired by models of rational choice, the term “pluralism” is associated with the idea of a free market system, which may ensure open competition for suppliers and the free choice for customers.

Pluralism may refer to all these meanings in sociology as well. However, social science has added further varieties of pluralism. In cultural sociology and ethnology, pluralism may refer to a fragmentation of culture into a set of subcultures demarcated by ethnic, linguistic, religious or other boundaries.

Within the context of social science discourse, pluralism means recognition of multiplicity in society and individual right for free choice. Pluralism as such means the presence of various national, religious and cultural traditions, which cast doubt on the idea of dominant uniform system of values, on which ideological, legal, religious institutes historically work.

Religious and cultural pluralism is not only the system of various values, acting

under the banner of religion and culture in its various modifications, it also has the secular tendency. From the perspective of the cognitivist school of sociological theory, represented by Peter Berger, “the phenomenon called ‘pluralism’ is the socio-structural parallel to the secularization of consciousness”⁶. From his point of view, secularization leads to a de-monopolization of religious traditions and to an upgrading of the role of lay people. On the religious market, denominations are increasingly forced to compete among themselves and with non-religious worldviews. In the book “The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age” (2014) Berger summarised his own work completed in the period of many decades. In his opinion secularization theory that saw modernity as a leading line to a decline of religion has been empirically falsified and should be replaced by a broader shift and a more nuanced theory of pluralism. Berger’s general conclusion is that we do not live in a secular age – we live in a pluralist one. If secularisation theory is not defensible, Berger tries to find an alternate paradigm that roots in the phenomenon of religious, political and cultural pluralism. His idea about multiple modernity offers new religious paradigm. He wrote: “Doubt is the pivot around which the dynamics of pluralism whirl”⁷. Much of the book

revolves around Berger’s core concept of ‘plausibility structures’. This concept helps him to understand that the essential mistake of both secularisation and sacralisation theorists was to “overestimate the coherence of human consciousness”⁸. Berger’s key idea that modernity is characterised by an intertwining of the sacred and secular give many possibilities to understand new role of religion in the contemporary world.

Almost at the same time, Zigmunt Bauman brings the meaning of “fluidity” to philosophical discourse. It refers to society as the leading metaphor for the present stage of the modern era. He connected this definition with time and concluded that “fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready to change it,... for liquids, on the contrary, it is mostly time that matters”⁹. For him, fluids pass around some obstacles, “the extraordinary mobility of fluids is what associates them with the idea of ‘lightness’”¹⁰. The “melting the solids” opens the door for the “profaning of the sacred”: for disavowing and dethroning the past, and first and foremost “tradition”. It “called for the smashing of the protective armour forged of the beliefs and loyalties which allowed the solids to resist the ‘liquefaction’”¹¹. The intention to make the world predictable and therefore manageable was broken by techniques which allow the system and free agents to remain

6 Berger, Peter. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, p.127; Berger, Peter and Luckmann, Thomas. 1967. *Aspects religieux du pluralisme*, in: Archives de sociologie des religions, vol. 23, pp. 117–127; Berger, Peter. 1992. *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity*. New York: Free Press.

7 Berger, Peter. 2014. *The Many Altars of Modernity:*

Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age. Boston, Berlin & Munich: De Gruyter, p. 66.

8 Ibid., p. 53.

9 Bauman, Zigmunt. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 2.

10 Ibidem.

11 Ibid., p. 3.

radically disengaged, to by-pass each other instead of meeting each other.

Bauman underlines such modernity features as:

- consumer choice is now a value in its own right and the life of a chooser will always be a fixed blessing;
- mixed blessings are the ones that arouse most contradictory sentiments, level highly ambivalent values, tend to generate incoherent and quasi-neurotic reactions;
- the principal dimensions of current evolution of urban life and the community are defined as watched borders rather than contents and thus leave no room for dialogue and negotiation;
- the general actor of liquid modernity is 'a public personae' that "without being nudged, pressed or cajoled to take off their masks and 'let themselves go', 'express themselves', confess their inner feelings and put on display their intimate thoughts, dreams and worries"¹².

The temple of consumption is a non-place that reminds of Michel Foucault's *boat*, which "is a floating piece of space, a place without a place that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea"¹³. For Bauman, place is pure, as pure as only the sites of religious cult and the imagined or postulated community may be.

As David Ley wrote "the pluralism of postmodern philosophies and multicultural societies make such dogmatic closures of the past no longer tenable". He adds: "A

much fuller intellectual project considers the actions of the caregivers, their definition of the situation and their extrapolation of a sacred text in everyday practice. Knowledge in this scenario requires not the colonization of religion by secular schematics but patient learning that pays tribute in its exposition to the language of faith and the categories of theology as well as the disciplines of the social sciences"¹⁴.

Towards the post-secular age

When we speak about post-secular cities, it is impossible not to recollect Harvey Cox's famous book "The Secular City" that was published 50 years ago and immediately started to be an international bestseller. In the article "The Secular City 25 Years Later", Cox wrote, "The thesis of 'The Secular City' was that God is first the Lord of history and only then the Head of the Church. This means that God can be just as present in the secular as in the religious realms of life... This idea has two implications. First, it suggests that people of faith need not flee from the allegedly godless contemporary world. God came *into* this world, and that is where we belong as well. Second, it also means that not all that is 'spiritual' is good for the spirit. These ideas were not particularly new". Cox does not agree with the famous words "God made the country, but man made the city". For him, "living in the city should be the school of living in the postmodern, 'illegible' world. It should be

¹² Ibid., p. 96.

¹³ Foucault, Michel and Jay Miskowicz. Of other spaces, *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1, spring, 1986, pp. 22–27, p. 26.

¹⁴ Ley, David. 2011. Preface: Towards the Postsecular City? *Postsecular Cities. Space, Theory and Practice*. 2011. Edited by Justin Beaumont and Christopher Baker. London-New York: Continuum, p. XIII–XIV.

a continuous lesson in “citizenship”, in how to live in the world city”¹⁵. The post-secular city, in contrast to the secular city, reflects a more contested space where hitherto distinct categories are increasingly converging within a post-metaphysical composite. In the post-secular city, the dividing lines and roles of faith and reason, tradition and innovation are no longer rigidly enforced. New relations of possibility are emerging. “Recognizing that the ‘turn to the post-secular’ is indeed a contested and multifaceted trend, we offer a vigorous, open but structured dialogue between theory and practice, but even more excitingly, between the disciplines of human geography and theology. Both disciplines reflect on this powerful but enigmatic force shaping our urban humanity”¹⁶. Beaumont and Baker, the editors of the book “Postsecular Cities. Space, Theory and Practice” described its aim as “to reflect on the so-called rise of postsecular cities by offering different understandings of them from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. Although foregrounding the contributions of urban theory and praxis, other key voices contributing to a 360-degree view of this new space will be those from philosophy, sociology, political economy, contextual theology and cultural studies”¹⁷.

The profane or non-profane spaces can only be divided up geometrically: they

15 Cox, Harvey. 1990. *The Secular City: secularization and urbanization in theological perspective*, first published 1965, 25th anniversary edition. New York: Collier Books, p. 2

16 *Postsecular Cities. Space, Theory and Practice*. 2011. Edited by Justin Beaumont and Christopher Baker. London-New York: Continuum, p. 2.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 5–6.

have neither qualitative differentiation, nor orientation, and are given by virtue of their inherent structure. From Eliade’s point of view, it is evident that, for more than a century the West has not been creating a “religious art” in the traditional sense of the term. For Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, “the topology and chronology of the sacred places and times... ground hierarchies. But these separations are demarked in such a manner that what most appears is the difficulty of stepping into and stepping out of these places and times”. From her point of view, our perception of life is “a way we feel today the whole as the global, the planetary: no way in, no way out, nihilism and boredom, absolute immanence and messianisms without future. But the no way in, no way out show how the today appears sensible, sensitively and sensuously for us”¹⁸.

How contemporary theology reacted on secular tendency and its theoretical explanation? The Radical Orthodoxy case is interesting for us as attempt to give answer on challenge of secularization.

Radical Orthodoxy is a theological movement that named as Cambridge school in the 90s. The theory of Radical Orthodoxy is characterized by four crucial affirmations:

- secular modernity is the creation of a perverse theology;
- the opposition of reason to revelation is a modern corruption;
- all thought which brackets out God is ultimately nihilistic;

18 Cavalcante Schuback, Marcia. 2012. *Appearing in Fragility, the Fragility of Appearing*. P. 158–159 <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:686185/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

- the material and temporal realms of bodies, sex, art and sociality, which modernity claims to value, can truly be upheld only by acknowledgement of their participation in the transcendent.

The founder of Radical Orthodoxy, John Milbank convinces theologians to get over their “false humility” in the face of modern secular reason. He declares claims that postmodernism has freed Christian theology from having to “measure up to... standards of scientific truth and normative rationality” and demonstrated that theology as such has the right to be outside from philosophy and by secular thought¹⁹.

It is not surprising then, that at the beginning of the 21st century a movement dubbed Radical Orthodoxy has emerged at the frontier of theology and postmodern philosophy. James K.A. Smith concludes: “Radical Orthodoxy should push us to reconsider our faith and practice in a postsecular world.”²⁰ Following the Radical Orthodoxy version, modernity is such historical moment that testifies the rise of liberal democracy and capitalism and must be seen as a pure project of power whereby the church and its activities are ejected from its necessary public space.

They use such terms introduced by the postmodern philosophers as “tolerant,” “pluralistic,” or “free” to make evident that the state has become the actual replacement for the church, replete with its own liturgies, practices, saints and holy days. *The Other Journal*.

19 Milbank, John. 2006. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Second Edition. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 1, 260.

20 Smith, James K. A. 2004. *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids, Baker Books.

An Intersection of Theology & Culture is one of the many Radical Orthodoxy’ journals that dedicates its issues to a pop and postmodern culture, human body in arts, sexuality, human traffic, ecological crisis and race. As example, the issue “Remembering the Future” is a collection of poems, essays, and interviews that ask readers to see their world with double-vision to imagine the redemptive consequences of engaging the world from both the biblical tradition and the cultural challenges. This cycle covers the works of such famous authors as William T. Cavanaugh, Dan Allender or Ken Gonzales-Day (American artists, best known for his photo-based conceptual projects exploring identity and race) and others. Catherine Pickstock summarizes the radical orthodoxy general idea: “It seems to me that there are no sharp boundaries between radical orthodoxy and other identifiable tendencies within what one might generally call postsecular theology”²¹.

Religious deconstruction

The religious postmodernism is a paradigmatic concept, which enables a deconstruction of religion as spiritual – social subsystem of society, and its integrating social function. Terminologically it would be more correct to speak about “religious aspects of post-modernity”, but we will use the phrase “religious postmodernism” as an accepted definition and for simplicity. The religious postmodernism is theologically and confessedly neutral, in contrast to religious modernism that created many confessional types (Christian,

21 Pickstock, Catherine. Reply to David Ford and Guy Collins, *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 2001, No 52, p. 406.

Judaist, Protestant and Orthodox). Religious postmodernism has integrated into a wide cultural and sociological context. Postmodern approaches and concepts, which directly or indirectly concern the phenomenon of religion, are usually not connected with names of known theologians or researchers (with minor exceptions). However, the deconstruction of religion is connected with names of known postmodernists – philosophers, linguists, ethnologists.

The deconstruction of religion means destruction of complete system representation as such, giving to religion irrational, fragmentary, inconsistent character. Nevertheless, it does not mean refusal of religion as such. In addition, the deconstruction of religion does not mean that it is atheism, which itself is a phenomenon of belief and requires a deconstruction. In postmodern understanding the religion loses the major social function connected to maintenance of solidarity in a society, as a result it leads to a deconstruction of a society.

The major categories determining difference between modernity and postmodernity with reference to the problem of religion, are *the differentiation* and *dedifferentiation*. Paul Heelas remarks that “religion has become more internally differentiated, very considerable contrasts now exist between traditional, authoritative religions of the text, liberal teaching with strong dose of humanism, prosperity teachings stamped with the mark of utilitarian individualism, and all those alternative spiritualities, such as New Age”²².

²² *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*. 1999. Edited by P. Heelas. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 2.

However, the modern epoch also includes dedifferentiation in the sphere of religion. This process incorporates a number of postmodern specific features which are evident in modern epoch. They are:

- development of humanistic ethics in close interrelation with a variety of spirituality kinds;
- the denomenalization as a process of free transition from one religious organization (church, denomination, movement, cults) to another, a simultaneity of presence in several of them with the purpose of satisfaction of spiritual, mental and social needs;
- unification as spreading process of a variety of probable ways in God’s comprehension;
- destruction of borders between sacrum and profanum and as a result “religious becomes less religious, and secular less secular”;

However, typically postmodernist features of religion that are not peculiar to the previous cultural paradigms, are the following:

- its maximal rapprochement with a cultural discourse and dissolution of the subject of religion in discourses of cultural processes;
- the refusal of regulation of religious sphere with cultural stresses to free choice;
- the mixing of the religious and the secular, their "hybridization", subordinating their pragmatic purposes to social ordinary life (Zen and the perfection of professional, creative skills)

The analysis of specific features of religious aspects of a postmodernism allows

to reach a conclusion that the concept of religious pluralism includes such terms as "plurality", "variety", "distinctions" and they are just a starting point for a postmodernist discourse, a basis for processes of integration without acceptance of the common agreement or a consensus on questions of values, the validity. It results from the methodological approach of postmodern theorists for which essentially important are not *that* the person knows or accepts for itself but *how* he/she does it.

Karen Armstrong, a well-known commentator and the expert on the problems of religion and politics, the author of the book "Fight for the God", considers that globalization and a situation of religious pluralism generates not only integration processes, but also results to division of the world into poles of a mutual distrust, intolerance and the open conflict.

Their basis is incorporated in the religious pluralism. From this point of view, it is argued, that "what seems sacred and positive in one camp appears demonic and deranged in the other"²³. Thus, globalism and increasing religious pluralism as a whole are not stimulus of public consciousness rationalization or secularization of religious life. Fundamentalism and mystification of various forms of daily and public life became ideological underlying reason of the main events at the end of the 20th century. More and more active reference to religious – civilization unity as to a source of self-identification and new form of loyalty has become one of the major

global tendencies of social development at the end of 20th – the beginning of the 21st centuries. Karen Armstrong notes: "They now live in societies which have either marginalized or excluded God, and they were ready to re-sacralize the world"²⁴. At the same time, she remarks "religion is hard work. Its insights are not self-evident and have to be cultivated in the same way as an appreciation of art, music, or poetry must be developed"²⁵.

Many researchers share the similar point of view. For example, Zygmunt Bauman affirms that there also exists specifically postmodern form of religion, which was born in internal contradictions to the postmodern, global world. He notes that "religiously-dressed form of fundamentalism is not a manifestation of eternal human irrationality and not a form of escape back into pre-modern past. It is thoroughly contemporary postmodern phenomenon, embracing the "rationalizing" reforms and technological developments"²⁶.

Conclusions

The secularization has not been the only alternative to religion. The hypothesis that all religious activities will be limited to the private life has been contradicted by their recent prevalent presence in the public life. The modern epoch also includes dediffe-

²⁴ Ibid., p. XI.

²⁵ Armstrong, Karen. 2009. *The Case for God: What Religion Really Means*. New York, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 8.

²⁶ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Postmodern Religion*. 1999. *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*. Edited by P. Heelas. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, pp. 55–78, p. 72.

²³ Armstrong, Karen. 2000. *The Battle for God*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, p. 367.

rentiation in the sphere of religion. This process incorporates a number of postmodern specific features, which are found in modern epoch: development of humanistic ethics, the denomenalization as a process of free transition from one religious organization to another, destruction of borders between sacrum and profanum that result in “religious becomes less religious, and secular less secular”. The postmodern features of religion include its maximal rapprochement with a cultural discourse, the refusal of regulation in religious sphere with cultural stresses to free choice, the process of mixing the religious and secular and their “hybridization”.

Across Europe, an increasing majority of the population has ceased participating in traditional religious practices on a regular basis, while still maintaining relatively high levels of private individual religious beliefs. Nowadays it is often possible to witness the unchurched of the European population and religious individualization rather than the secularization. Today some researchers look on secularization as a teleological process of modern change

and on “secularity” as “a sign of the times.” It is easier to explain the internal variations within Europe in terms of church-state relations, than in terms of modernization.

Linda Martín Alcoff and John D. Caputo in the introduction to the book “Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion” write about the text of H el ene Cixous that “her essay, while more personal than political and more literary than theological, may be viewed as a contribution to the constitution of a third way that eschews both secular capitalism and theocracy, that rejects both instrumental reason and a fanatical faith, that eludes both secular fathers and the fathers of faith. She searches for a deeper and more nuanced sense of worldliness that does not insulate itself from a certain faith even as she pursues a sense of faith that is faith in the promise of this world, a faith in life”²⁷. This measured half-toning distinguishing intonation is so necessary in our time.

27 Alcoff, Linda M. and Caputo, John D. Introduction. *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion*. 2011. Edited by Edited by Linda Mart ın Alcoff and John D. Caputo. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Pp. 1–16, p. 9.

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