

RENDER UNTO CAESAR THE THINGS WHICH ARE GOD'S

The Democratic Requirement of Political Profound Secularization

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to make sense of conceptual disagreements concerning secularization and to offer a new reading of the term that makes its use possible in political theory as well as relevant for democratic theory.

I first give an account of the controversy by reviewing different systematization theories. Then I argue for a new typology that divides the concept into eight forms of secularization. This new understanding of secularization makes it unnecessary to choose among the different dimensions of the concept and reveals the single process that is at stake: a process from a pre-secular stage to a secular situation that can be applied to different objects of analysis (individuals, society, politics, religion). Finally, I identify one of these forms, the Political Profound Secularization, as a requirement for modern democracy. I claim that the conceptual separation of God and Caesar, or in other words the distinction between a religious and a political sphere, is insufficient and that democracy demands that the source of legitimacy itself be transferred from the former to the latter. In a secular city, religion has lost its function of legitimizing political decisions; this role has to be played by the people and by the people alone.

INTRODUCTION: DEFINITIONAL CONTROVERSIES

Anti-Secularization Theorist: Secularization is incorrect, because there is still religion in the modern world.

Pro-Secularization Theorist: I never claimed that religion would disappear.

Anti-Secularization Theorist: So you agree that secularization is incorrect then.

Pro-Secularization Theorist: No, because secularization is not about the disappearance of religion.

Anti-Secularization Theorist: You don't get to change the meaning of the concept just because you realize that the concept doesn't make any sense.

Pro-Secularization Theorist: You don't get to create a new meaning just to find a way to reject a concept that you don't like.

The above dialogue, although admittedly highly simplified, illustrates a very common kind of disagreement among scholars. To be fair, the quality of the arguments is usually better but the gap between the two positions is just as big as suggested here: anti- and pro-secularization theorists seem to be speaking different languages.

The starting point of this paper is precisely this definitional issue: what is meant, or what should be meant, by "secularization"?

What motivated this focus on secularization theory (or theories) is my embarrassment when facing this kind of dead end, as well as a specific interest for secularization that I suspect to be much more relevant for democratic theory than is usually acknowledged.¹

What has been called the "secularization debate" refers to the controversies over the definition(s) of the concept of secularization. Some demand a new conception, some go as far as to ask for the abandonment of the concept. Reading critics of the concept of secularization such as David Martin, Talal Asad or Jeffrey Hadden stimulates some questions not only about the concept itself, but more generally about its use and treatment by the scholarly community: is there actually something that can be called "secularization", in singular, that would refer to one specific process? Is there anything we can save from secularization theories that would be useful for us? Why would it be relevant to return to this secularization debate? Is there anything that can be said beyond

¹ It is for this reason that I am focusing on secularization and not on secularism. In a nutshell, the difference between the two concepts is that secularization refers to a descriptive process whereas secularism refers to a doctrine. The perspective is different, although the phenomena to which the concepts refer might be the same. The concept of secularism not only suggests that the process of secularization is considered as good in itself, it also implies that it is worth encouraging the process. This paper does not make any claim about the potential validity, by definition normative, of secularism. However, it is not the object of the present work.

a mere statement of incompatible conceptions of secularization and the discovery of a consensus so minimal that the concept itself seems to disappear behind its own timidity?

David Martin presents himself as “one of the first among sociologists, perhaps even *the* first”² to question the concept of secularization. He is indeed, to my knowledge at least, the first author to argue for the abandonment of the concept in his 1965 essay “Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization.”³ He writes: “The object of this paper is once again to place certain question marks against the notion that religion and modernity are necessarily incompatible.”⁴ However, he specifies later that this might qualify only “a version of the theory of secularization,”⁵ suggesting that there might be other versions, among which it would be hypothetically possible to find a relevant and / or accurate one. To be fair, it seems very unlikely that secularization was ever intended to be the claim that religion and modernity are incompatible, although we must acknowledge that some possible tensions between the two are suggested. His reproaches to the concept of secularization (or, rather, to the theorists that developed this concept and saw secularization as a historical process that could be observed) are various: not only is the concept incoherent,⁶ but it is also source of misinterpretations of human history⁷ and the result of Eurocentric thinking.⁸ His conclusion is twofold. First, concerning Europe, the dynamic of secularization is slowing down or even stopping and we should expect new forms of religiosity. Secondly, concerning the rest of the world, they are not and should not be following the European way: “It was in Europe that the sociological model of secularization was devised, and that perhaps is where it belongs.”⁹

Today, Talal Asad is the most famous adversary of the concept: he not only criticizes the relations that are sometimes suggested between secularization and democracy¹⁰ but also rejects the possibility of application of the concept outside of

² Martin David, 1991, “The Secularization Issue: Prospect and Retrospect,” in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 42, No. 3 p. 465.

³ Martin David, 1965, “Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization,” in Julius Gould (ed.) *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences*, London: Penguin.

⁴ David Martin, “The Secularization Issue: Prospect and Retrospect,” p. 465.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 465. He specifies that this version of the theory of secularization “envisaged a steady shift from a religious period in human affairs to a secular period.” However, depending on what exactly is meant by “religious period” and “secular period,” this version of the theory of secularization could be right or wrong, useful or not, helpful to understand human history and modernity or stating something that never happened. It will be one of the points of this paper to explain what these “religious” and “secular” periods can refer to.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 465: “the notion of secularization was itself internally incoherent.”

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 466: “in this manner actual history (if such a phrase is allowed) was sucked up, subsumed and redistributed by the machinery of sociological assumptions and concepts.”

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 466: “there is a tendency to identify the truly modern moment as what occurs in western Europe.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

¹⁰ Asad Talal, 2003, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 5: “the assumption that liberal democracy ushers in a direct-access society seems to me questionable.” The possible connections between democracy and secularization will

Europe. Asad usually talks about “secularism”, as opposed to secularization, which he claims is mostly a doctrine¹¹ rather than an historical process. Jeffrey Hadden develops the similar argument that “secularization theory has not been subjected to a systematic scrutiny because it is a *doctrine* more than it is a theory.”¹² But Hadden goes further and claims that the only force of the concept derives from the fact that it has been “sacralized”¹³ which is why it has not been questioned, despite the various and rich empirical data casting doubt on its validity and despite the fact that “*the data cannot confirm the historical process predicted by secularization theory.*”¹⁴ As a result, Hadden agrees with David Martin that the concept should be dropped.¹⁵

The awkward feeling that we get, after getting some idea of what the debate looks like, is that ultimately “secularization means whatever I say it means.”¹⁶ It is necessary to reopen this debate and discuss the different positions because they give us an idea of where we stand on the secularization issue and because the conceptual clarifications are crucial to understanding the complex and seemingly contradictory relationships between religion and democracy.

I am not suggesting that, given all these serious disagreements among these very eminent scholars, I can just create an original definition about which everyone could agree. I am, on the contrary, arguing that there must be something true in each of these definitions. The concept itself is created and strengthened by these debates and it cannot simply be asserted that the debates got it wrong. I therefore think it is not only impossible to resolve the secularization debate, but it is actually unnecessary; it is possible to make sense of all definitions at the same time.

Secularization authors seem to speak different languages and to refer to different phenomena, doctrines and norms with the same concept.¹⁷ They come from different intellectual backgrounds and have different ambitions and reasons for focusing on the concept of secularization; there is obviously no unanimous definition of this concept, shared by all of them. However, two points of agreement exist.

First, these authors seem to agree that there has been a process of differentiation associated with modernization that affects the functioning of society in general and of

be discussed at length in section III of this paper. But it should be already noticed that the understanding of secularization as “direct-access society” is already problematic.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15: “a modern doctrine of the world in the world.”

¹² Hadden, Jeffrey K. 1987. “Toward desacralizing Secularization Theory,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 65, No. 3, p. 588.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 588: “secularization was more than taken-for-granted; *the idea of secularization became sacralized.*”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 600.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 599: “I think the sounder conclusion to be reached from his work is the same that Martin and Shiner reached two decades ago.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 599; Hadden does not agree with this statement, he rather uses it to give an idea of the kind of issues we are dealing with concerning the secularization debate.

¹⁷ By secularization authors, I mean those who gave the first formulation of the concept, in the 19th century; those who rejected it in the 20th century and those who tried to rescue it after this.

religion in particular. Nevertheless, they disagree on the nature and the degree of the impact of this process on religion. Even though some of these authors claim that differentiation is part of secularization, or even that it is the most important dimension of it, the concept of secularization should not be reduced to the concept of differentiation. Later in this paper, I will argue that differentiation is in fact the necessary first step of secularization but that other forms of secularization exist (all of them implying secularization as a basic precondition).

The second area of agreement is the idea that religion, because of this process of differentiation, goes through some major changes; but again, secularization theorists do not agree on the changes implied by differentiation. Even the greatest adversaries of secularization accept and assert that “as a result of the rise of science in the modern world, religions can no longer include magic in their offering.”¹⁸

The ambition of this paper is to gather different understandings of the concept, present the many dimensions that I have described by many different authors and, through this analysis, reveal the single framework that can be called “secularization.” The reason this inquiry matters is because there is something about secularization that is related to our modern understanding of democracy. The reconceptualization of secularization is not an end in itself but, rather, a tool used to highlight some interesting relations between religion and democracy.

I first present different attempts to systematize the theory of secularization (Section I). Every systematization offers a typology of secularization and I discuss the different categories of the concept identified by all.¹⁹ I then try to find a way to reconcile these different typologies by offering a new way to understand secularization, dividing the concept into eight different forms (Section II). I identify a specific form of secularization particularly relevant for modern theories of democracy. Finally, I analyze in more details how religion, democracy and political legitimacy relate to each other (Section III). The argument defended in this paper is that there is a dimension of political secularization required by the democratic understanding of legitimacy.

¹⁸ Tschannen Olivier, 1994, “Sociological Controversies in Perspective,” in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 75

¹⁹ The reader in a hurry can skip this description of the systematization theories and jump to the summary list of proposed categories (p. 17).

I. THE SECULARIZATION DEBATE: AN ANALYSIS OF SYSTEMATIZATION THEORISTS

The purpose and methodology of systematization theorists differs from those of conceptualization theorists. Conceptualization theorists present a new understanding of secularization without attempting to map major existing conceptions on their own distinction. Famous examples include Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Peter Berger or Thomas Luckmann, but also, in a very different perspective, the critics of the concept, David Martin or Talal Asad. Such conceptualization theorists are concerned with the concept itself whereas systematization theorists are concerned with the different uses of the concept.

Conceptualizations can also be characterized as normative works:²⁰ authors give a new conception of a debated term, arguing that this new conception is more appropriate to understand how things should be or more accurately describe how things are. They will often use other definitions to emphasize their differences and explain why their own is better. On the contrary, systematizations are mostly descriptive attempts to present all (or, more reasonably, the most important) existing conceptions. They try to make sense of the various disagreements among conceptualization theorists without, at least in the first step, taking a side in the debate. Usually, systematization theorists do not stop at this first descriptive step and often offer a normative evaluation of the conceptions. However, the main purpose of conceptualization theorists is to find the best way possible to understand the concept itself, whereas the main purpose of systematization theorists is to review the community of scholars working on the concept and bring to light the points of consensus and of disagreement.

The focus of section I is not the concept itself but its treatment by the scholarly community. I present and analyze 6 systematizations, offered by 6 different authors between 1967 and 1994:²¹ “The concept of secularization in empirical research”, by Larry Shiner, published in 1967; “Les théories sociologiques concernant la sécularisation”, by Jan Lauwers, published in 1973; “The Situation for Modern Faith”, by John Coleman, published in 1978; “Trend Report: Secularization: a Multi-Dimensional Concept”, by Karel Dobbelaere, published in 1981; “The Secularization Paradigm: A

²⁰ A normative conceptualization of secularization does not amount to offering a prescriptive, normative, view of secularization. It merely means that the definition offered by the conceptualization theorist is presented as a better, more appropriate or more correct, description of what secularization means.

²¹ This list is obviously not exhaustive. For example, Tschannen adds to the list of “authors who review the literature on secularization” the names of Hermann Lübke Lübke Hermann, 1964, “Säkularisierung as Geschichtsphilosophische Kategorie,” in Kuhn Helmut, Wiedmann Franz, *Die Philosophie und die Frage nach dem Fortschritt*, Munich: Pustet) and Peter Glasner (Glasner Peter E., 1977, *The Sociology of Secularization: a Critique of a Concept*, London: Routledge).

Systematization”, by Olivier Tschannen, published in 1992; and *Public Religions in the Modern World*, by José Casanova, published in 1994.²²

1.1. LARRY SHINER, “THE CONCEPT OF SECULARIZATION IN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH”, 1967

This text, the earliest attempt of systematization of the concept of secularization included in the present analysis, starts from the problem of definition and the measurement issues derived from it. Shiner argues that, as long as we do not really know what secularization is about we cannot find a way to measure it empirically and, therefore, it is impossible to make any claim about its validity or falsity.

Shiner begins with a historical overview of the concept, identifying its first modern use during the negotiations for the Peace of Westphalia and its first academic use, “as a descriptive and analytical term”²³ in the works of German 19th century sociologists Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch. He then distinguishes between six different types of usage of the term today:

1. Decline of religion

*The previously accepted symbols, doctrines and institutions lose their prestige and influence. The culmination of secularization would be a religionless society.*²⁴

2. Conformity with “this world”

*The religious group or the religiously informed society turns its attention from the supernatural and becomes more and more interested in “this world”.*²⁵

3. Disengagement of society from religion

Society separates itself from the religious understanding which has previously informed it in order to constitute itself an autonomous reality and consequently to limit religion to the sphere of private life. The culmination of this kind of secularization would be a religion of a purely inward character, influencing neither institutions nor corporate

²² This choice of texts published between the 1960s and the 1990s should not give the impression that the debate is over. There is actually a new interest for the questions of secularization and secularism. The publication of Taylor’s *A Secular Age* in 2007 is one of the major contributions of this new debate. I decided to focus on older texts because the temporal distance makes it easier to define the limits of the debate. The debate in which Charles Taylor and Rajeev Bhargava are taking part today is still ongoing. Yet the intellectual perspective and, as a result, the focus of the conversation, have changed: Taylor and Bhargava are both philosophers and not sociologists. This probably explains, at least in part, why they discuss “secularism” rather than “secularization,” as secularization refers to a historical (and partly sociological) process, whereas secularism refers to a philosophy or comprehensive doctrine (see note 1, page 2).

²³ Shiner Larry, 1967, “The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research,” in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 208.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

*action, and a society in which religion made no appearance outside the sphere of the religious group.*²⁶

4. Transposition of religious beliefs and institutions

*Knowledge, patterns of behavior, and institutional arrangements which were once understood as grounded in divine power are transformed into phenomena of purely human creation and responsibility.*²⁷

5. Desacralization of the world

*The world is gradually deprived of its sacral character as man and nature become the object of rational-causal explanation and manipulation. The culmination of secularization would be a completely "rational" world society in which the phenomenon of the supernatural or even of "mystery" would play no part.*²⁸

6. Movement from a "sacred" to a "secular" society

*The culmination of secularization would be a society in which all decisions are based on rational and utilitarian considerations and there is complete acceptance of change.*²⁹

Switching from a descriptive systematization to a normative stance on the concept, he suggests that the best thing would be to "drop the word entirely and employ instead terms such as "transposition" or "differentiation" which are both more descriptive and neutral."³⁰ But, knowing that this is very unlikely to happen, he therefore offers two solutions to make the concept of secularization more useful. The first solution is to "state carefully his intended meaning and stick to it,"³¹ but that would not prevent people from using different definitions, it would only make the impossibility of dialogue even more obvious. The second solution would be "for researchers to agree on the term as a general designation or large scale concept covering certain subsumed aspects of religious change," but this might lead us to identify a very minimal, or maybe too minimal, definition to reach a consensus.

1.2. JAN LAUWERS, "LES THÉORIES SOCIOLOGIQUES CONCERNANT LA SÉCULARISATION", 1973

Lauwers identifies three types of secularization theories, each of which is related to a specific concept.

The first set of theories, Lauwers writes, is related to conceptions of **pluralization** and refers mostly to the works of Will Herberg and J. Milton Yinger. Another group of theories emphasizes the **privatization** of religion and is at best

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 215-216.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

represented by Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger. The last set of theories focuses on **rationalization**, which are deeply influenced by the works of Max Weber and Bryan Wilson.

Lauwers asserts that these groups of theories could simply have been named pluralization, privatization and rationalization; however, he chose to call them “secularization theories” because they all share two common basic assumptions. The first is that it is possible to distinguish between the “essence” of religion and its “accidental” forms; this distinction is necessary to give a definition of religion that includes different kinds of religion, different historical manifestations. The second is that it is possible to distinguish between what is religious and what is not religious; that distinction is the logical implication of the first assumption.

Lauwers argues that these two assumptions form the normative program of secularization theorists and claims that they are not sociological but ideological,³² expressing the will of some authors to single out religion and organize society in a new non-religious way.

1.3. JOHN A. COLEMAN, S.J., “THE SITUATION FOR MODERN FAITH”, 1978

Coleman starts from the strong disagreements between sociologists concerning secularization. He argues that “the secularization thesis in sociology is neither a theory nor, properly, even *one* concept”³³ and undertakes to analyze different uses of the concept in order to reveal possible areas of consensus or shared ideas.

First, Coleman gives what he calls “some stipulated definitions”³⁴ of key concepts. The secularization thesis is defined as a “claim that there is a long-term process in modern society by which the quantum of the secular is increasing in proportion to the quantum of the sacred.”³⁵ The thesis of secularization is thereby distinguished from three other terms: “the secular” and “secularity”, which both simply refer to what is under the control of man himself; and “secularism”, which Coleman defined as atheism: the idea that there is nothing else than the immanent world and no one above man.

Coleman then identifies four “maps of secularization” and associates each of them with specific authors (conceptualization theorists).

³² “[Les présupposés sécularisants] ne sont pas sociologiques mais de caractère idéologique, même s'ils sont observables dans la réalité sociale. Ils sont l'expression d'un cadre de pensée et d'un cadre de légitimation, d'un programme en rapport avec la fonction sociale de la religion,” Lauwers Jan, 1973, “Les théories sociologiques concernant la secularization – Typologie et critique,” in *Social Compass*, Vol. 20, p. 530.

³³ Coleman, John A. 1978. “The Situation for Modern Faith,” *Theological Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 602.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 603. See definitions of “the secularization thesis” (page 603-604), “the secular” (p. 604), “secularism” (p. 605) and “secularity” (p. 605-606).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 603-604.

Map 1: The Asymptotic Demise of Religion

The classic or strong version of the secularization thesis argues that the sacred is irreversibly declining in modern society under the combined onslaught of urbanization, technology, modern society, empiricism, increased levels of education, and the spread of belief in rationality.³⁶

This version of secularization comes from three different sources: Comtean positivism, which states that religion will be overcome by science and reason; the identification of religion with an illusion (Freud) and the instrument of human alienation (Marx); and the idea of a “decline of culture and spirit in the fact of modern technique and civilization”³⁷ associated with Weber.

The best proponent of this first map is Bryan Wilson, himself heir of Comtean positivism, who claims that secularization is not a prescriptive theory but the historical fact of the loss of influence of religion.³⁸ The argument is that in modernity religion becomes incompatible with the development of a *Weltanschauung* based on rationalization and science and is therefore doomed to decline.

Map 2: The Privatization of Religion

There is a new social of religion in modern society. The primary public institutions neither maintain nor reflect the sacred cosmos. Neither does the church. Instead, individuals have direct access to an eclectic assortment of religious beliefs and rituals in secondary institutions of religious consumerism.³⁹

This version of secularization is associated with Thomas Luckmann and, to some extent, Peter Berger.⁴⁰ Here, it is not a disappearance but a deep transformation of religious practice and beliefs. This, however, has a strong impact on society in general: because of the restriction of religion to the individual private sphere, even though people might still, individually, be very religious, religion (and more precisely churches) has lost its power on society.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 612.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 613.

³⁸ Wilson Bryan, 1966, *Religion in Secular Society*, London: Watts, p. xi: “the fact that religion – seen as a way of thinking, as the performance of particular practices, and as the institutionalization and organization of these patterns of thought and action – has lost influence.” (quoted by Coleman, p. 613)

³⁹ Coleman, p. 617.

⁴⁰ The first texts of Peter Berger on this topic, from a time where he was in very close collaboration with Thomas Luckmann, are clearly in favor of the concept of secularization and associate the concept with the idea of privatization and individualization. However, Peter Berger changed his mind later (see notable Berger Peter (ed.), 1999, *The Desecularization of the World: resurgent religion and world politics*, Washington D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center).

Map 3: The Transposition of Religion into the Secular Realm

Rather than seeing “secularization” as a moral and religious decline or collapse, Parsons suggests that it involves instead the transposition of religious values into the secular realm, such that formerly specific Christian attitudes, e.g. the dignity of individual conscience, care for the poor, and egalitarian élan, became widely available, in secular guise, as the moral bases of modern industrial society. In this view, modern Western culture, far from being secular, is anonymously Christian.⁴¹

This third version is associated with Talcott Parsons who, interestingly, claimed that, “far from being more secular, the modern world is more religious than before.”⁴² By this he means that what previously counted as religious is now so deeply integrated that it is now considered as secular. This explains how entire societies in Western Europe can be shaped by Christian values although these societies consider themselves secular. Therefore, we are only less religious in the sense that we can no longer identify the source of our beliefs and attitudes as religious, although in actuality they are (or at least previously were).

Map 4: The Persistence of the Sacred and Its Emergence in New Sites

There is some validity to the contention of the secularization thesis that the situation for modern faith is different from that of earlier epochs. The changes that count involve privatization, rationalization, and individualization. They imply not the asymptotic demise of religion but the fact that “man is far more personally involved in choosing his religious values than before.” But the necessity of interpretation and choice does not make individuals any less religious than before.⁴³

This last version of secularization is associated with Andrew Greeley, one of the greatest enemies of the concept. It argues that secularization does not lead to the disappearance but to the transformation of religion. Religion will not and cannot disappear but it now takes new forms. This version is related to the second map, as privatization is one of the new characteristics of modern faith, but implies more, like the strong claim that religion is here to stay and that other major processes, like rationalization, play a role in shaping the new “religious.”

Coleman argues that the obvious differences and incompatibilities between the four maps bring to light the fact that “not only is the secularization thesis unproven (also not disproven); it is in no coherent sense one theory.”⁴⁴ Coleman therefore chooses

⁴¹ Coleman, p. 619.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 618.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 622. The quotation is from Greeley Andrew, 1972, *Unsecular Man*, New York: Schocken, p. 52.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 623.

fifteen authors⁴⁵ and compares the way define and employ the concept of secularization in order to identify some areas of agreement between them.⁴⁶ There is, first, a clear consensus on pluralism: all of the 15 authors except David Martin agree that modern societies are more pluralistic than pre-modern societies. Three other issues are identified as historical facts by a majority of the 15 authors: loss of control by churches, individual autonomy, greater institutional autonomy and privatization.

As a result, Coleman emphasizes the fact that “the sacred is not declining; it is shifting its locus.”⁴⁷

1.4. KAREL DOBBELAERE, “TREND REPORT: SECULARIZATION: A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CONCEPT”, 1981

Dobbelaere's report on secularization was written for the purpose of clarifying the concept of secularization, a concept that “has always retained the ambiguous and consequently controversial meaning that it had from the start.”⁴⁸ Dobbelaere identifies three different dimensions in the concept.

First of all, secularization means *laicization*, and refers to a differentiation process: institutions are developed that perform different functions and are structurally different.⁴⁹

Religious involvement refers to individual behavior and measures the degree of normative integration in religious bodies. It is an index of the accord between the norms of religious groups – in domains of beliefs, rituals, morals, etc – and the attitudes and conduct of their members. [...] **Religious change**, on the other hand, expresses change occurring

⁴⁵ The fifteen authors included in Coleman's comparison, who can therefore be considered as what Coleman imagines as the community of secularization scholars, are the following: Andrew Greeley, Huston Smith, Guy E. Swanson, Clifford Geertz, Roland Robertson, Bryan Wilson, Robert Bellah, Peter Berger, Gerard Lenski, Thomas Luckmann, Thomas O'Dea, David Martin, Hans Mol, Talcott Parsons and Charles Glock. The first table analyses their positions on the following six issues: (1) the extent of true secularism; (2) an assessment of individual religiosity; (3) an assessment of social-structural religiosity; (4) an assessment of the religiosity of cultures; (5) an assessment of the influence of organized religion on society; (6) recognition of ideological components in the secularization thesis. Only 4 of the 15 authors think that the phenomenon of secularization is increasing in at least 3 out of the 5 areas of secularization (1 to 5) and none of these 4 authors recognize the presence of ideological components in the secularization thesis. These authors are: Bryan Wilson, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann and Thomas O'Dea. They can be considered as the best proponents of the concept of secularization among the 15 authors chosen by Coleman.

⁴⁶ Uncovering the areas of agreement is the point of Table 2 that analyzes the positions on the 15 authors on six new issues: pluralism, loss of control by churches, individual autonomy, identity function, privatization, greater institutional autonomy. See Coleman, p. 629, Table 2.

⁴⁷ Coleman, p. 627.

⁴⁸ Dobbelaere, Karel 1981. “Trend Report: Secularization: A Multi-Dimensional Concept”, *Current Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

in the posture of religious organizations – churches, denominations, and sects – in matters of beliefs, morals, and rituals, and implies also a study of the decline and emergence of religious groups.⁵⁰

Dobbelaere can therefore explain why it is possible to say that a country is secular based on one definition but not secular based on another: the United States, for example, is highly secular in the sense of laicization, but not at all in the sense of religious involvement.

The three different dimensions should be understood as different processes, not necessarily interrelated and not necessarily produced by the same causes or in the same circumstances.⁵¹ Dobbelaere emphasizes the impact of specific cultural contexts on the form that secularization processes can take. This makes it possible to distinguish a thesis of secularization that aims at explaining, in a descriptive way, the social differentiation resulting from historical processes (laicization) from what could be called a doctrine of secularization (or at least a normative version of secularization) according to which religion would eventually disappear (and should do so).⁵²

Dobbelaere traces back each of these three different dimensions to different intellectual sources: laicization is associated with Durkheim, Parsons, Luckmann, Berger and Wilson; Weber and Berger are the main authors on religious change; religious involvement mostly refers to the Marxist critique of religion and prediction that it will disappear with human emancipation.⁵³

This thesis of religious change is very interesting and rather surprising in a sociological work; usually, the internal secularization of religion is overlooked by sociologists, who focus mostly on the consequences on individuals and communities.

This report is particularly helpful for us because Dobbelaere refers heavily to major secularization theorists. He explains the categories he identifies in secularization in terms of the categories identified by Larry Shiner and, thereby, makes it much easier to see how major trends are shaped. Dobbelaere explains that what he calls laicization refers to three of Shiner's dimensions of secularization, namely desacralization, differentiation and transposition;⁵⁴ religious involvement is Shiner's decline of religion and religious change Shiner's conformity with "this world".⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11-12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151: "Present research does not enable me to suggest clear links between laicization and religious involvement or between religious change and religious involvement."

⁵² The dimension of religious involvement, also called the decline of religion thesis, can be understood as both a descriptive and a normative statement. It is not required to reject religion as the manifestation of human alienation to make the scientific claim that religious participation and beliefs are decreasing.

⁵³ Marx distinguishes between *political emancipation*, the separation of church and state, and *human emancipation*, "the emancipation of the real man from religion." (Marx Karl, [1844], *On the Jewish Question*, in Robert Tucker (ed.), 1972, *The Marx Engels Reader*, New York: Norton, p. 40)

⁵⁴ Dobbelaere, p. 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

1.5. OLIVIER TSCHANNEN, "THE SECULARIZATION PARADIGM: A SYSTEMATIZATION", 1992

Tschannen distinguishes himself from other attempts of systematization (he notably mentions the works of Shiner, Lauwers and Dobbelaere) because, he argues, they emphasize the differences between secularization theories whereas he brings to light the similarities. However, he also cites Coleman as another example of a systematization that insists on similarity rather than differences.

Tschannen's motivation is similar to Dobbelaere's: he wants to rescue the concept of secularization to make its scientific use possible and relevant. Although he also recognizes the inherent ambiguity and plurality of the concept, and that it is therefore impossible to talk about a single theory of secularization, Tschannen argues that there is still some fundamental unity and he makes the ambitious but very interesting claim that secularization should be understood as a paradigm, in the Kuhnian sense of the term. He therefore undertakes to uncover the "exemplars"⁵⁶ of the secularization paradigm.

Tschannen's key argument is that the secularization paradigm is formed around three shared exemplars: differentiation, rationalization and worldliness.

In the course of history, religion becomes progressively differentiated from other domains of social life, eventually emerging as a very specific institutional domain within a new type of social structure made up of several such institutions (education, politics, economy, etc). For example, the Church and the State become clearly differentiated (*differentiation*). At the same time, the different non-religious institutions born from this process of differentiation start working on the basis of criteria that are rationally related to their specific social functions, independently from any religious control or guidance. Thus, for example, the economy starts to work in a rational way dictated by its own inherent logic (*rationalization*). The impact of these processes on the religious sphere itself causes it to lose some of its specificity and to become more worldly. Religious organizations start to cater to the psychological needs of their members (*worldliness*).⁵⁷

Differentiation is presented as the most important concept as it has many consequences: autonomization, privatization, generalization, pluralization and decline in

⁵⁶ Tschannen Olivier, 1991, "The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 30, No. 4, p. 396: "Exemplars can be defined briefly as shared examples of past scientific achievements, or as problem solutions. These simple cognitive devices help the scientific community function *even in the absence of universally shared rules and theories*." The Kuhnian paradigm includes many other elements, like the existence of a scientific community, that Tschannen also tries to identify.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 400-401.

practice.⁵⁸ Tschannen identifies only scientization and sociologization as consequences of rationalization, as well as collapse of the worldview and unbelief as the combined effect of both rationalization and differentiation. No consequence is associated with worldliness.

Tschannen also mentions “two broad preliminary assumptions”⁵⁹ that also belong to the secularization paradigm: the fact that the origins of the process of secularization are religious and the claim that secularization does not, and cannot, lead to the disappearance of religion.

Tschannen acknowledges that the exemplars and assumptions of his paradigm cannot be found in every single theory of secularization. Nevertheless, he claims that the core element of the paradigm, differentiation, is shared by all theories: “Differentiation, in one form or another, is absolutely central to all the secularization theories, without exception.”⁶⁰

1.6. JOSÉ CASANOVA, *PUBLIC RELIGIONS IN THE MODERN WORLD*, 1994

The starting point of Casanova's work is the observation that empirical analyses tend to contradict the theory of secularization. As it has become obvious since the 80s that religion is not disappearing, and is not even remaining in its own sphere but on the contrary still plays some role in the political realm, we thus have to conclude that something is wrong with the theory of secularization. Casanova argues that it is not “secularization” itself that went wrong, but rather some interpretations of the concept.

Casanova identifies three different theses contained in the concept of secularization. The first, differentiation, is referred to as the “core and central thesis” of secularization:

The core and central thesis of the theory of secularization is the conceptualization of the process of societal modernization as a process of functional **differentiation** and emancipation of the secular spheres – primarily the state, the economy, and science – from the religious sphere and the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere.⁶¹

The differentiation thesis qualifies as minimal because it is considered to be the common denominator of every theory of secularization. This suggests that in modernity there is a clear distinction between what is religious and what is not, which suggests that

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

⁶¹ Casanova José, 1994, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 19.

the sub-spheres within the secular sphere can function without religion, a religious legitimation or religious foundation, or the support of religious institutions and norms.

Therefore, the differentiation refers to the breakdown of the wall separating the religious and the secular spheres. The fact that those spheres are no longer distinct could seem contradictory with the idea of differentiation; actually, this breakdown is what allows the creation of a genuine secular world, within which religion must now find its own place as a sub-sphere among many others, which forces it to abandon both its claims of superiority and of being the only holder of legitimacy. The thesis of secularization as differentiation means that the world in which we live is conceived as a single secular world, divided into many autonomous spheres, and this world is the new "all-encompassing reality, to which the religious sphere will have to adapt."⁶²

The second thesis of secularization (or first sub-thesis) is the thesis of the decline of religion:

One subthesis, the **decline-of-religion** thesis, postulated that the process of secularization would bring in its wake the progressive shrinkage and decline of religion until, some extreme versions added, it eventually disappeared.⁶³

This second thesis postulates that, with modernity, religion will tend to be weakened, and will eventually disappear. The thesis has its origins in the Enlightenment critique of religion. It was assumed that the reign of reason would come with the process of modernization. Faith was conceived by Enlightenment philosophers as obscurantist and anti-rationalist, so the compatibility of faith and reason seemed impossible. Therefore, with the rationalization of society, it was assumed that the progressive decline of religion would follow, until it disappears completely. Therefore, Casanova writes, "all the branches of the Enlightenment agrees that this 'religion of the priest', the Roman church and all established churches, was bound to disappear with the fall of the ancien régime and the establishment of political liberties."⁶⁴

The third thesis (second sub-thesis) is the privatization thesis:

The other subthesis, the **privatization** thesis, postulated that the process of secularization would bring in its wake the privatization and, some added, the marginalization of religion in the modern world.⁶⁵

The argument is that religion will progressively become completely irrelevant from a social point of view. In other words, this thesis does not postulate the

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

disappearance of religion but the fact that religion “becomes so subjective and privatized that it turns ‘invisible’.”⁶⁶

The most complete elaboration of this thesis is found in Thomas Luckmann's *Invisible Religion*, to which Casanova refers extensively. For Luckmann, modernization implies differentiation. This differentiation causes not only the loss of power of religion on the other spheres, which can now function in an autonomous and secularized way, but also the pluralization of worldviews and their privatization. His explanation for privatization is the following: the individual has to participate in different spheres and each sphere functions independently of the others, therefore the individual has to divide her own existence into different autonomous roles; thus, the individual and social differentiation creates an internal differentiation at the individual level. Because secularized spheres do not intervene in religious affairs, the logical consequence is that religion becomes the affair of the individual and its relevance is limited to the private sphere. Religion will not disappear, but it will eventually lose its traditional social functions.

This privatization thesis is demanded by liberal theories and the emphasis on the distinction between the public and the private spheres. The privatization thesis does not merely rely on the idea of the freedom of the state and other secular spheres from religion, but also on the idea of freedom of religion from state intervention and on the highly liberal idea of the freedom of the individual from both state and religion. Casanova insists that privatization is a “historical option,”⁶⁷ and he is right to specify that it is “mandated ideologically by liberal categories of thought.”⁶⁸

This third thesis is the main target of Casanova's criticism. Privatization, he claims, is not implied by secularization; it is an attempt to impose a liberal conception of the distinction between the private and the public and the liberal demand of the exclusion of religion from the public sphere.

Casanova, against such liberal arguments, claims that religions can play a public role that would not threaten our political organization, liberal democracy, and on the contrary that would be completely legitimate and that could even support liberal democracy.⁶⁹ Secularization does not imply privatization, so it is possible to conceive of a role for public religions in the modern world.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁹ Casanova argues that some forms of public religions in the modern world can be both “viable” and “desirable”: “By ‘viable’, I mean those forms of public religion which are not intrinsically incompatible with differentiated modern structured. By ‘desirable’, I mean those forms of public religion which may actually contribute to strengthening the public sphere of modern civil societies.” (*Ibid.*, p. 7-8)

SUMMARY LIST OF CATEGORIES OF SECULARIZATION

Based on the 6 systematization theories, we obtain a list of 18 different categories that are supposed to be part of the secularization theory. To find a way to give a place in the theory to each one of them without renouncing the unity of the concept will be the purpose of section II.

1. **Asymptotic demise of religion:** COLEMAN
2. **Conformity with “this world”:** SHINER
3. **Decline of religion:** CASANOVA, SHINER
4. **Desacralization of the world:** SHINER
5. **Differentiation:** CASANOVA, TSCHANNEN
6. **Disengagement of society form religion:** SHINER
7. **Individualization:** LAUWERS
8. **Laicization:** DOBBELAERE
9. **Persistence of the sacred and its emergence in new sites:** COLEMAN
10. **Pluralization:** LAUWERS
11. **Privatization:** CASANOVA, COLEMAN
12. **Movement from a “sacred” to a “secular” society:** SHINER
13. **Rationalization:** LAUWERS, TSCHANNEN
14. **Religious change:** DOBBELAERE
15. **Religious involvement:** DOBBELAERE
16. **Transposition of religion into the secular realm:** COLEMAN
17. **Transposition of religious beliefs and institutions:** SHINER
18. **Worldliness:** TSCHANNEN

II. TOWARD A NEW TYPOLOGY OF SECULARIZATION

The purpose of this section II is to formulate a new understanding of secularization that allows for a plurality of different (and sometimes incompatible) dimensions without abandoning the idea of a single framework.

Before detailing the different steps of the construction of this new modelization, I want to make two basic assumptions explicit. The first concerns the definition of religion and the second describes the necessary pre-secular original situation that needs to precede secularization.

Any theory or typology of secularization assumes some definition of religion. Formulating such a definition goes well beyond the purpose of this paper. For now, it is enough to accept Durkheim's definition: "*A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.*"⁷⁰ However, what matters here is not the detailed characteristics of what Durkheim considers as religion, but rather the fact that, even if I were to disagree with his definition, I would still need some understanding of religion that would allow me to distinguish between what is religious and what is not. There can be no concept, idea or theory of secularization without the acknowledgment of a difference between the religious and the non-religious. There can be no "secular" without a "religious."

The second assumption is the idea that not just any society can become secularized. There can be secularization only where there is an initial religious situation with specific characteristics. If, hypothetically, individuals had never been religious at all, they could not be considered as secular. Secularization describes a process starting in a religious stage and ending with a secular stage. Therefore, secularization not only refers to religion as a concept, it also refers to religion as a reality.

This means that perhaps secularization cannot happen universally, not because the possibility of a secular state is only compatible with some specific forms of religion (which I think is wrong) but because the initial pre-secular stage itself is related to specific forms of religion. There can exist religion in a society without this society being "religious" in the relevant, pre-secular, term: it is possible that some societies have never been organized according to the sole authority of a religion.

2.1. FOUR TYPES OF SECULARIZATION

The distinction between the four kinds of secularization is the result of the attempt, developed in section I, of a meta-systematization of the most influential and important systematizations of the secularization concept.

⁷⁰ Durkheim Emile, 1995 [1912], *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields, New York: Free Press, p. 44.

My argument is that there are different kinds of secularization between which we should clearly distinguish based on the fact that their objects are different. They do not differ in degree but in nature. Each kind of secularization is a different answer to the question: what is secular? In this paper, I argue that there are (at least) four different ways to answer this question, which are enough to explain the disagreements between anti- and pro-secularization theorists.

The first answer is: *individuals*. Secular individuals can be without religion (a-religious, agnostics) or against religion (irreligious, atheists). On this individual level, the relevant unit of analysis is the individual himself: it is a useful type of secularization to acknowledge the existence of secular individuals in a non secular society or the (very likely) existence of non secular individuals in a secular society. It is also necessary to recognize some kind of dimension of secularization close to atheism and decline in belief. I call this *individual secularization*.

The second answer is: *society*. Saying that society is secular refers not to individual religiosity but to processes of differentiations and presence of religious groups or communities in the public sphere (as opposed to the political sphere). It differs from the previous type of secularization to the extent that what matters is not individual religiosity but precisely the collective and public presence and power of religious communities. I call this *sociological secularization*.

The third answer is: *politics*. This is the dimension of the secularization thesis that is the most relevant for us, from the point of view of political theory, but it is often ignored or overlooked by sociology of religion. This is a focus on the political and legal systems but does not, intentionally, include actors as such. This type of secularization is only concerned with the conceptualizing relations between the state and the law, on the one hand, and religion, on the other, which is distinct from the relations between people in power and religion. I call this *political secularization*.

The fourth and last answer is: *religion*. The idea of secular religion is not an oxymoron but does involve some deep transformation of religion, not only in the forms it takes but also in the values it promotes, the ambitions it has and more importantly the ways it interacts with non-religious spheres. This does not mean that there is no god or no transcendence anymore; it merely means that religion has evolved in order to survive in a secular environment. I call this *theological secularization*.

There is a necessary logical or chronological order not between all different forms, but between some of them: as we will explain later, certain types of secularization must exist before other can come into existence.⁷¹

The four types of secularization encompass 17 categories identified by the six systematization theorists analyzed earlier (except one). Individual secularization refers to decline of religion (Casanova, Shiner), demise of religion (Coleman) and religious involvement (Dobbelaere).

Sociological secularization is associated with differentiation (Casanova, Tschannen), laicization (Dobbelaere), disengagement of society from religion (Shiner), transposition of religious beliefs and institutions (Shiner), desacralization of the world (Shiner), movement from a

⁷¹ See Section III, page 25.

“sacred” to a “secular” society (Shiner) transposition of religion into the secular realm (Coleman) and pluralization (Lauwers).

Political secularization has not been specifically analyzed by any of the systematization theorists and no political category has been offered by any of them as a particular dimension of secularization. That is largely explained by the fact that most of them are sociologists, except for the theologian John Coleman. Their emphasis on the consequences of secularization on individuals and society and which is justified by their intellectual perspective. Political theorists, on the other hand, usually associate the idea of secularization with the institutional separation of Church and State.

Theological secularization has been presented under the terms of privatization of religion (Coleman, Casanova), persistence of the sacred and its emergence in new sites (Coleman), religious change (Dobbelaere), conformity with “this world” (Shiner), worldliness (Tschannen) and individualization (Lauwers).

The only category that does not fit is rationalization (Tschannen, Lauwers). I understand rationalization as the main cause of secularization, not as its manifestation; consequently it should be considered as related, to some extent, to all types of secularization rather than belonging to any specific type: it does not fit in any single type because it actually fits in every one of them.

As the list of systematization theorists analyzed in this paper is not exhaustive, there must be other categories of the concept of secularization and it is very likely that some of them would not fit in any of the four types of secularization I am presenting. But as this model is not definitive and it is possible to find new answers to the question “what is secular?” I believe the existence of such categories would not be a problem for the model; on the contrary, it would offer the opportunity to make it better.

2.2. TWO DEGREES OF SECULARIZATION

I argue that there are two different degrees of secularization: a superficial and a profound.

By superficial, I mean the manifestation of religion as something that has a concrete presence in the real world. The superficial degree refers to the organization of religion, implying the existence and functioning of religious groups, religious institutions and religious practices. The religious institutions have to be understood in a broad sense, not only as the official organization of the Church but, more fundamentally, as the empirical presence of religion and presence in the reality of society.

By profound, I mean the fundamental level of motivation and beliefs, not of practice. It focuses on religion not as an observable presence in the world but as a normative source. What matters is not only religious beliefs but the use of these beliefs, of religious norms, to inform judgment and guide action.

These two degrees do not imply any normative evaluation: the superficial is not necessarily irrelevant and is not a necessary precondition of profound secularization (depending

on the type of secularization, it might even be the opposite⁷²). The term superficial is only used in a descriptive way: it means that it is the kind of secularization that can be empirically observed and measured. On the contrary, profound secularization refers to the normative dimension of secularization and cannot be quantified. Superficial secularization is evaluated in terms of visible presence or absence, whereas profound secularization has to be conceived of in terms of more or less power and influence.

There is also no necessary chronological order between the two degrees, except for some specific types of secularization when the one is the precondition of the other.

2.3. EIGHT FORMS OF SECULARIZATION

The four different kinds of secularization and the two different degrees give us eight different definitions, that I call *forms of secularization*. Before analyzing the interactions of these forms with one another and the relevance of each for political theory, let me explain what each form refers to.

(1) The Individual Superficial Secularization (ISS) refers to the measurable absence of religious practice. The unit is individual practice, but this form of secularization is sometimes used as a basis for claims about religiosity in society in general, in which case what is meant is that there is an increasing percentage of the population that does not practice religion. In other words, it is important to distinguish individual secularization applied to society and sociological secularization.

(2) The Individual Profound Secularization (IPS) refers to the decline in belief. Saying that an individual is profoundly secularized therefore means that he does not use religious norms to guide his actions and his life because he does not believe in any religious norm. This is different from a situation where an individual would be a religious believer but would not use religious norms to guide his actions: this would not be a case of individual profound secularization, but a case of internal inconsistency of the individual (where the actions cannot be explained by the beliefs) or the result of a transformation of religious beliefs (potentially understood as metaphors instead of commands, for example). A profoundly secularized individual is either agnostic or atheist. He most certainly has beliefs, but these beliefs are not defined, by the individual himself or by standard scientific definitions, as religious.⁷³

(3) The Sociological Superficial Secularization (SSS) refers to the absence, weak presence, or invisibility of religious groups in civil society. This is, of all eight forms of secularization, the least likely to happen. It seems that it could only be the long-term result of an individual secularization, on both superficial and profound levels, and where such secular

⁷² That is for example the case with sociological profound secularization that is the precondition for sociological superficial secularization as well political and theological secularization (all other forms of secularization except the two forms of individual secularization).

⁷³ I am not saying that there can be such a thing as a single religious individual; as implied by Durkheim's conception of religion, there is always a collective dimension in religion. However, I am implying that there can be such a thing as a single secularized individual, although it is not very likely to occur.

individuals represent an overwhelming majority of a given population; in such a case, the civil society of this population might be superficially secularized.

(4) The Sociological Profound Secularization (SPS) is the precondition for most forms of secularization (all except superficial and profound individual secularization) and it is what explains that secularization theory is usually thought of as conceptually related to modernization. It refers to the differentiation of spheres: not only to their separation but the fact that they now function according to different sets of norms. It is formulated clearly by Karel Dobbelaere: "What I intend to do is to study secularization as a process of laicization, conceptualized as a process of differentiation, i.e. a process of growing independence of institutional spheres (such as politics, education, economy and science), each developing its own rationale, which implies the rejection of the overarching claim of religion."⁷⁴

(5) The Political Superficial Secularization (PSS) refers to the non-establishment, the official and legal institutional separation of church and state. Based on this definition, the United States and France are secular but Sweden and England are not. However, this superficial and objective separation does not say anything about the power or influence of the said church.

(6) The Political Profound Secularization (PPS) is only concerned with the political power of religion. If political authority has nothing to do with religious authority and if religious reasons are not used to justify laws and political decisions, then the state is considered secular.

(7) The Theological Superficial Secularization (TSS) refers to the evolution in ways of being religious, resulting from a modernization and transformation of religion itself. It is measurable to the extent that it has implications on religious practice, notably in terms of privatization and individualization of practice. Religion is theologically superficially secularized when religious believers, although they still practice religion (and therefore cannot be considered as superficially secularized individuals), do so in a new way. This superficial secularization is the visible consequence of the Theological Profound Secularization: new ways to practice religion are the result of new ways to believe. The unit of analysis would be religious individuals as well as religious communities and would focus on the ways they act and present themselves to the secular world.

(8) The Theological Profound Secularization (TPS) refers to the transformation of religious doctrines themselves through modernization. It is not the content so much as the ambitions of the religious doctrines that have evolved. For example, sacred texts are no longer considered as factually valid descriptions of historical events but as metaphorical narratives and normative symbols.

The following table illustrates the typology of secularization defended in this paper: it insists on the importance of the pre-secular stage and clarifies the differences between the eight forms of secularization.

⁷⁴ Dobbelaere, p. 14.

	PRE-SECULAR	SUPERFICIALLY SECULARIZED	PROFOUNDLY SECULARIZED
INDIVIDUALS	Belief and practice	ISS (1) No religious practice	IPS (2) Agnosticism and atheism
SOCIETY	All-encompassing religion	SSS (3) Few (or no) religious groups in civil society	SPS (4) Differentiated society
POLITICS	Established church and theocracy	PSS (5) Non-establishment	PPS (6) Secular political justification
RELIGION	Absolute dogmatic religion	TSS (7) Privatization and Individualization of religious practice	TPS (8) Liberalization and relativization of religious doctrines

The light grey column emphasizes the necessity of a pre-secular stage defined as the second basic assumption of the typology. I argue that this pre-secular situation has to be considered as part of the secularization theory.

The colored box, “Political Profound Secularization,” indicates my focus on this specific form of secularization, discussed at length in the third section of this paper.

Although I argue for a distinction between these different forms of secularization, I do not claim that each can be found individually or that they are unrelated. The main purpose of the distinction is to be able to identify the dimension of the concept that matters from the perspective of political theory.

This attempt to distinguish between eight forms is obviously artificial and is only relevant in terms of conceptual clarification. In truth, I want to bring to light the way these different forms are deeply interconnected and how each of them comes into existence. For example, the presence of an official church does not entail the existence of a politically dominant religious doctrine; this obliges us to distinguish between the two cases, although the latter does entail the former; in other words, the fact the a state is not superficially secularized does not mean that it cannot be profoundly secularized.

The logical connections between individual and sociological secularizations are also complex. For a society to be superficially secularized means that most of the individuals of this society are superficially (and probably as well profoundly) secularized. Consequently, individual secularization is the precondition of sociological superficial secularization. However, secular individuals can exist, and empirically do exist, in societies that are not superficially secularized, like in the United States.

III. RELIGION, DEMOCRACY AND LEGITIMACY

Depending on the intellectual perspective, different forms of secularization will be highlighted. I now develop a reading of this table from a democratic perspective. I argue that, if we are concerned with liberal democracy, we should be concerned first and foremost with Political Profound Secularization.

3.1. READING OF THE EIGHT FORMS OF SECULARIZATION FROM A DEMOCRATIC PERSPECTIVE

All the necessary elements have been explained and it is now possible to raise the political question that is the main purpose of this paper: what exactly does this typology of secularization tell us about democracy? How does it help us to understand the most desirable relations between religion and democracy?

The argument is that the only form of secularization that is a requirement for democracy is the political profound form, but this specific form is only possible in a situation where society is profoundly secularized (i.e. differentiated) and where religion is profoundly secularized (i.e. modernized).

What is called Sociological Profound Secularization should actually be understood as one of the major characteristics of modernity and is, therefore, a prerequisite for other forms of secularization. As long as religion is the overarching principle of organization of society, everything else (including the state) is subordinated to it and no other form of secularization, except for very rare cases of individual secularization,⁷⁵ is possible.

Next in the order of importance comes the theological secularization, at the profound level: it is a step on the way to political secularization. It seems to be a direct consequence of differentiation. The best formulation of this argument that secularization, in the form of “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols,”⁷⁶ imposes some internal transformations on religion itself is to be found in Peter Berger’s *The Sacred Canopy*. Berger argues that “secularization has resulted in a widespread collapse of the plausibility of traditional religious definitions of reality.”⁷⁷ this is what

⁷⁵ The fact that sociological profound secularization is the prerequisite for all other forms of secularization except for the individual type means that it is possible to find evidence of individuals were considered themselves as secular before modernization. However, it also suggests that the individual type of secularization is conceptually related to modernization, although the importance of individual secularization is obviously increased in modernity, especially because it is affected by other forms of secularization.

⁷⁶ Berger, Peter L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, p. 107. This conception of secularization corresponds to what has often been called differentiation, here referred to more specifically as Sociological Profound Secularization.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

he calls the correlation between subjective secularization (on the level of consciousness) and objective secularization (on the socio-cultural level).

These changes in religion are not without problems and usually take some time and do not occur without resistance, sometimes violent, on the part of religion. But eventually religion will have to face a very simple dilemma and make a choice: adapt or disappear. It cannot remain what it has always been, it cannot fulfill its traditional task anymore, "which is precisely the establishment of an integrated set of definitions of reality that could serve as a common universe of meaning for the members of a society."⁷⁸ Because of social differentiation, religion must lower its ambitions. For Berger, differentiation leads to pluralization of society and, as a result, to the understanding of religion as a voluntary association: "Allegiance is voluntary and thus, by definition, less than certain."⁷⁹

This deep internal transformation of religion is demanded by society, not by religion itself. This means that religion can sometimes live in the illusion of resisting modernization when the modernization is actually already on its way. The necessity of the resistance itself is already the proof that transformation is occurring and that the battle for traditional religion is already lost.

A direct consequence of theological profound secularization is theological superficial secularization, but the process between these two forms can take several centuries.

The only relevant form of secularization concerning democracy is political profound secularization: for a democracy, it is enough to have a separation between political affairs and influence of religious doctrines.

This is as far as the theory of democracy goes concerning the appropriate role, place and status of religion.

3.2. DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY: THE DOUBLE BIND OF SECULAR LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

The necessity of political profound secularization comes from our understanding of democratic legitimacy. If the issue of secularization, of the possible and / or desirable interactions of religion and politics are so passionately debated, it is precisely because the question of the source of political legitimacy is at stake.

This is, in a very simplistic and schematic way, how we could describe the problem: in a democracy, it seems that all traditional sources of legitimacy have become unavailable, in particular religious legitimacy. The reason is that democracy is a political organization characterized by autonomy and popular sovereignty. Religion seems to be the exact opposite: even though there is some space for some extent of autonomy in a few cases,⁸⁰ it is usually

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁸⁰ There is some danger in this kind of generalization on religion, especially because I haven't even tried to give a definition of religion. I am therefore careful in saying that religion is always a synonym of heteronomy and acknowledge that some forms of religion might accept a certain of autonomy. The most famous example of this would be Protestantism; but an emphasis on individualism is not the same as

considered as the paradigmatic example of heteronomy and, as all power comes from God, sovereignty is divine by nature. Today, laws are not expected to be obeyed because they stem from the divine will or because they correspond to some normative conception of man. According to our modern understanding of democracy, we obey the laws (and are legitimately expected to do so) because they are the direct or indirect expression of the sovereign will of the People.

Democratic legitimacy is granted to laws that are made by the people, for the people. It would consequently seem, at first sight, that religion has lost its authority from the point of view of democracy itself. Of all traditional types of legitimacy, religion seems to be the one that would be the least compatible with democratic legitimacy. Where democratic legitimacy implies an immanent process, religious legitimacy implies the recognition of an already-existing and absolute truth.⁸¹

Does that mean that the question of the place of religion in democracy is solved? It seems that it does: politically and conceptually, and from the impersonal perspective of our political organization and from the abstract perspective of a theory of democratic legitimacy, religion has no place.

Nevertheless, taking this answer as an end point to our reflection would be not only naïve but irresponsible: saying that religion has no place from the point of view of the democratic state is not a satisfying solution; it is rather the beginning of more troubles as it opens the door to an unavoidable and deeply confusing contradiction. Indeed, a focus on legitimacy tells us that to some extent, religion and democracy are incompatible. However, if we take a different focus on our political organization, not one of legitimacy but one of individual rights, it seems that democracy, in the sense that we understand it today,⁸² can only deserve its name when it guarantees basic individual rights, including religious freedoms: hence, to some extent, religion and democracy are not only *not* incompatible, but they are actually necessarily connected to each other.

This means that it is now a requirement, for a polity to be considered as a liberal democracy, to guarantee religious freedom to individuals. Even in the most radical cases of separation between religion and politics, religion needs some kind of protection from political authorities: individuals need to be guaranteed the right not only to believe in a god, or gods, but also the right to worship in the way one finds the most appropriate. Both freedom of belief and free exercise are a necessary requirement of liberal democracy.

This means that, in itself, religion is not always the enemy of democracy,⁸³ or at least that democracy is not (and cannot be) the enemy of religion. Religious freedom could be seen as the

autonomy, and even in this case there would still be heteronomy, in the sense that rules are not made by people to which they apply but by some exterior entity, in the case of religion by God.

⁸¹ This incompatibility only makes sense with a traditional and pre-secular version of religion.

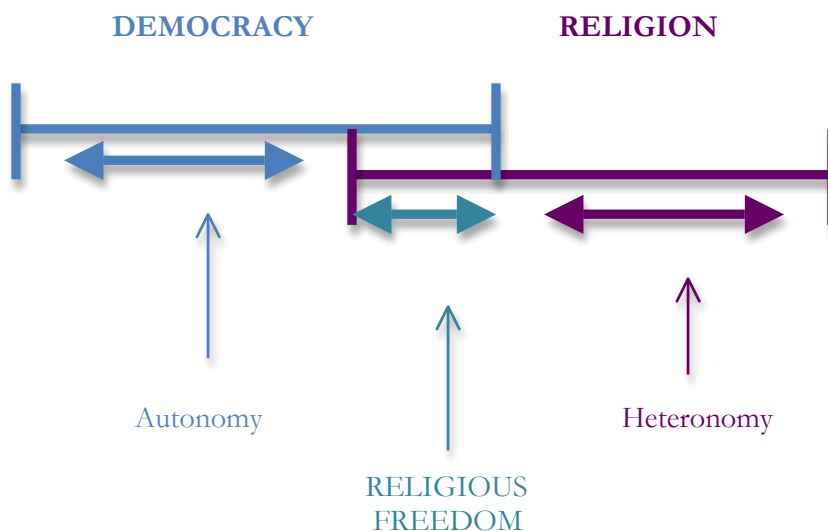
⁸² Obviously, a democracy is not necessarily liberal; but it is how we understand democracy today, and even though it is possible, theoretically, to have a political organization that is democratic but does not guarantee basic freedoms to its citizens, this could be not considered as a “good” democracy today. In this paper, democracy, when it refers to contemporary democracy, is always understood as liberal.

⁸³ This is not the place to summarize the history of the relations between religion and democracy; it is enough to note that religion has played for a long time the role of the worst adversary of democracy, but

juxtaposition of autonomy and heteronomy because it acknowledges the fact that believing in god, and applying his law to one's life, is based on an individual choice and that no one can be forced to believe.⁸⁴ However, even though religious liberty is one of the necessary conditions of a liberal democracy, it has not always been accepted by religion itself. The best example (because it is the most radical example) is the example of the Catholic Church: it is only after the Second Council of Vatican, with the encyclical letter *Dignitatis Humanae*, that the Catholic Church recognized religious freedom.⁸⁵ For centuries, religious freedom was compatible with Protestantism but not with Catholicism.⁸⁶

When I argue that religious freedom is a necessary juxtaposition between democracy and religion, that it creates some kind of neutral space between autonomy and heteronomy, I mean it as a conceptual connection that did not always occur historically. This common ground takes something from autonomy, to the extent that it is an individual freedom, as well as something from heteronomy, to the extent that it means subjecting oneself (supposedly voluntarily) to the power of a superior authority.

These two opposite relations between democracy and religion, on the one hand the incompatibility concerning legitimacy and on the other hand the necessary juxtaposition concerning religious liberty, can be illustrated with a very simple graph:



even in its most radical form (the Catholic Church) it ended up accepting and often integrating democratic values. From this complicated and long history, it is sufficient for the purpose of this paper to be reminded that religion is not, by nature, incompatible with democracy, even though it might be in some particular cases.

⁸⁴ This liberal conception of religion (i.e. profoundly secularized) seems to be an excessively naïve understanding of why an individual is religious. This “choice” is usually not a genuine one.

⁸⁵ Declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* on the right of the person and of communities to social and civil freedom in matters religious promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965.

⁸⁶ This obviously does not mean that democracy is only compatible with Christian religion. However, it explains that a specific religion can be internally divided, between a modernized part compatible with democracy and a traditional part incompatible with democracy.

This graph should obviously not be seen as an exhaustive presentation of all relations between democracy and religion; it only takes into account the way they diverge on the question of legitimacy and the way they converge on the question of religious freedom.

It should also be specified that both kinds of relation, convergence and divergence, are purely conceptual and cannot be applied to individuals or groups. So far, I have only attempted to give an account of the way two concepts interact, and nothing can be derived from this graph in terms of the way people could or should interact. Religious freedom, although it is conceptualized here as a connection between autonomy and heteronomy, has often been, in fact, denied by religions themselves. I have also made no claim concerning religious believers and it is clear that the fact that religious legitimacy and democratic legitimacy are incompatible does not mean that all religious believers reject democratic legitimacy, or that as religious believers they would have a moral duty to do so. The conceptual tension between the two kinds of legitimacy is not a reason to assume that equivalent tensions exist between believers and non-believers concerning the source of legitimacy. However, it does follow from this conceptual tension that religious believers could face dilemmas when they recognize the validity of democratic legitimacy: but again, this is only an hypothesis based on conceptual interactions, and no such dilemma can actually be predicted because it would only occur in cases where individuals relate in a very specific, demanding and exclusive way to their religious beliefs. In practice, this dilemma seems to fade away with theological secularization and the resulting modern understanding of religion.

The confusing and fascinating double bind that has been revealed between our two concepts is exactly what makes the question of the place of religion in democracy, also called the question of secularization, so interesting. What is at stake is not religion but democracy itself, what makes it possible and what threatens it. This is precisely how we should approach the issue of secularization: not as a question about religion, but as a reflection about the two extremes of the spectrum of liberal democracy, its conditions of possibility and the conditions of its destruction or denial.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the famous arguments made in favor of the religious roots of secularization is the reference to the distinction between God and Caesar. I believe this biblical statement has often been misunderstood. It is a dangerous argument to make, to the extent that it seems to suggest that Christianity would be the background against which secularization could occur. I agree that this statement is an expression of something that could lead to secularization eventually, but it is in no way the origin of secularization itself. The same is true for the fact that the concept was first developed in Europe: the fact that the concept is originally European, Christian, or maybe both, does not mean that what the concept is referring to is only European or Christian.

“Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and render unto God the things which are God’s” does not mean more than a mere differentiation between the political and the religious spheres. This should not be interpreted as a political secularization because political secularization is much more demanding: in the profound sense, it means that religious and political “things,” reasons, are not only different, they are exclusive. It is very unlikely that what was meant by this statement was the moral right for Caesar to rule without using the guidance of religious norms.

This is why political profound secularization should rather be understood as the fact to render unto Caesar the things which are God’s. This means that the religious ambitions have to be reduced for a polity to be considered as politically profoundly secularized. Modernization implied a switch from a religious to a democratic understanding of political legitimacy; as a result, religious authority has to be simply ignored when it comes to political affairs. Anti-secularization theorists would be right to argue that such a demanding conception of political secularization would lead to the political exclusion of religious reasons: they would be right, because it is exactly the point of political secularization.

Therefore, I argue that the criterion of political profound secularization should be added to the list of requirements for democracy. In itself, modern democracy demands that religion be kept at a certain distance, far enough to not have any influence on political decision-making but close enough to preserve religious liberties. It is not enough that God and Caesar are conceptually or even institutionally separated; when it comes to political affairs, God must be silent. Political profound secularization means that God’s authority concerning the life of the city is transferred entirely to the people and his words and orders cannot be the appropriate source of democratic legitimacy. From now on, all power comes from the people.

It is true that only a specific form of religion (but not any specific religion) is compatible with democracy: it has to be theologically secularized, the “*kind* of religion that enlightened intellectuals like Casanova see as compatible with modernity”⁸⁷ denounced by Talal Asad. Does

⁸⁷ Asad, p. 183.

that mean that democracy demands a modern “liberal”⁸⁸ version of religion? Yes, it does; but this is a good thing rather than a flaw. This kind of modern religion must accept that it is limited to a specific sphere.⁸⁹ It must accept that the truth of religion cannot guide political decisions. All religions can be compatible with political secularization (and consequently with liberal democracy), but political secularization is always incompatible with any kind of religious extremism that would not acknowledge the distinction between the religious and the political sphere (and the distinction between religious legitimacy and political legitimacy).

The deeper question triggered by this analysis of the concept of secularization and its interpretation from the perspective of democracy goes well beyond the purpose of this paper: it suggests that reality, unfortunately, does not fit into small boxes. Individuals, playing their role as citizens in a democracy, have an influence on the political affairs. Even though it might be the case that religion has lost its authority from the point of view of the democratic state, it does not (and cannot) result from this that religion has lost its authority from the point of view of the democratic citizen. God must be silent, but the citizens who still believe in his existence and in the validity of his words are not.

As a result, the relevant question here is the following: what should we do if the traditional sources of legitimacy, including religion, carried by the citizens in a modern and liberal democracy, were offered as backups or even replacements for democratic legitimacy? What kind of political legitimation is legitimate in democracy? What happens if a majority of individuals decides to bring religion back? What exactly does it mean to say that religion cannot be the source of democratic legitimacy? Does that mean citizens do not have the legal right, or maybe the moral right, to use religious motivation to inform their judgment and justify their positions in political discussion? Or is that only forbidden for these special citizens who embody the state, like judges and public officials? Can a religious reason be used in the formulation of a legal text? Can a religious reason be used in justifying a political decision? The attempt to tackle such questions is part of a bigger project, of which the present paper represents the very beginning.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 183: this kind of modern religions corresponds to “religions that have accepted the assumptions of liberal discourse.” I agree with Asad that some kind of “liberalization” is implied, except he means it as an insult and I take it as a compliment.

⁸⁹ This differs from the idea of privatization. My point is that modern religion would be limited to a non-political sphere, not necessarily to a private one. For example, this is compatible with the presence of religious groups in civil society (public, by definition).

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