

PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

## Secularised City: Between Religiosity and Spirituality

To cite this article: Andrzej Napiorkowski 2019 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng.* **471** 112033

View the [article online](#) for updates and enhancements.

# Secularised City: Between Religiosity and Spirituality

Andrzej Napiorkowski <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Fundamental Theology, Ecumenism and Dialogue, John Paul II Pontifical University in Krakow, 25 Kanonicza Street, 31-002 Krakow, Poland

anapiorkowski@wp.pl

**Abstract.** The article presents one of the most inalienable dimensions of man that is his need for spirituality, which itself demands its proper form, including an architectural one. As modern anthropology states, man is not only a material being, nor only a psychological one, but also has a spiritual dimension. Due to the increasingly weaker role of Christian Churches in Western Europe, there arises the question regarding in what manner and in what sense can a man of the post-modern period satisfy his spirituality? Various religious offerings often do not fully live up to their task. Their propositions are quite often marked by an excessive emotionality and sensibility. Despite all this, we are faced with the question about Church religiosity and Church spirituality in this situation. It is also a matter that is probably more institutional, one that is tied with rationality. Faith, after all, always requires reason.

## 1. Introduction - Economy or ideology?

Even though the situation in European Union member states is most often expressed in black and white terms, when striving to form a balanced and responsible opinion, we are free to state that people are, overall, living quite pleasantly. On the one hand, in comparison to other parts of the world, the average citizen of Europe, in practice, enjoys numerous rights that people from Africa, Asia or Latin America can only dream of. It is a broad palette of privileges, starting with the dignity of the human person, the rights afforded to it through access to employment, social security, culture, healthcare and even to rest and pension. On the other, concern should be expressed as to the lack of the reform of the structures of the European Union, where a departure from its original objectives and goals is taking place – goals that, according to its founders, a united Europe was meant to serve.

When the European Coal and Steel Community was founded in 1952, its founders wanted to support economic development, employment and living standards in its member states through the establishment and regulation of a common market. Economic ties, as well as cultural and economic wealth were thus meant to eliminate all future conflicts or wars in Europe. This has, for the most part, been achieved! The establishment of an even greater structure was performed on this basis, that of the European Union, in 1993, which today includes 28 member states (2018) and whose contributions to peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe are undeniable. The unification of countries has led to the removal of many nationalisms. The idea of one Europe has, furthermore, turned out to be a powerful and productive moral force.

However, the fathers of Europe's unity, such as J. Monnet, R. Schuman, P.-H. Spaak, K. Adenauer and A. De Gasperi, would strongly protest if they saw the considerable divergence between their vision and the current state of the West. Unfortunately, the elites currently running the European Union are spreading their ideological concepts ever more broadly, instead of focusing on the economy and respecting the separateness and identity of national communities. The current ideologisation of the EU



that is being performed, and which has little to do with politics, leads to justified protests. Having power “by the grace of God” (*Dei gratia*) limited the monarch, while currently the so-called “representatives of the nation” – are representatives of absolute absolutism. We can see less and less authentic democracy in member states when the dictum of European commissioners is marked by an evident stripping of citizens of their subjectivity. As a result of media manipulation carried out either on their behalf or of that of their principals, societies are becoming nothing more than rabble. And rabble thinks that by degrading the system of axiology, that system will be placed within its reach. During times of an apparent democracy, conceit is becoming widespread.

Current technological development has caused not only social, but also aesthetic and cultural changes, in addition to changes associated with religion. This can be seen on the example of modern art, which is enjoying such great an authority among its audience that the quality of this art currently does not matter much to said audience. The talent of some artists is often not enough to overcome the disgust that is caused by the personality or object expressed in a given work. For some time, novelty in the sphere of art has been drawn from something that is the opposite of the creative process. The period of postmodernity that we are currently living in proclaims that the time of certainty has irrefutably passed, which is why new forms must be developed. Its messengers preach that today man must learn to live without sense, in the current of temporariness and transience. The postmodern man thinks that something that lasts for more than a couple of years is unbearable. Temporary solutions have appeared in the place of such things, signifying a lack of sensitivity. The currently all-powerful indifference is also characteristic of our times [1].

Without reference to God, no civilisation is capable of development. The increasing internal emptiness of the West can destroy these grand achievements that have so far been attained on the Old Continent after the Second World War. The exhaustion of the spiritual energies of the West will also take away the strength it needs to develop in all spheres. When pondering the fundamental problem of Europe, cardinal Ratzinger concluded that it is a crisis of the idea of God. “The question about God is a fundamental one, that places us on the crossroads of human existence” [2].

## 2. The concept of the human person

These ideological, economic and political transformations have, naturally, made their mark on customs. The unnaturally generated culture has given rise to different societal needs, changing the image of man that has so far functioned throughout the centuries. Anthropology resulting from Judaic and Christian revelation - which preached that man had been created from nothing (*ex nihil sui subiecti*) in the image and likeness of God, and as such man is characterised by reason, volition, freedom and responsibility, as well as spirituality - used to be accepted.

According to the Bible, man is also a sinner and requires redemption. This release must come from within, as man is not capable of redeeming himself. Straying from God also requires the solving of the problem of sin, forgiveness and redemption. And thus, in place of Christian soteriology, a new, different method of explaining human guilt and its absolution had to be developed. So-called psychoanalysis (S. Freud) and psychotherapy have appeared. These efforts took on varying forms, starting with the proclamation of the eternity of matter in the nineteenth century to theses of the nonexistence of personal evil or the lack of the source of sin in human nature, something that has been decidedly contradicted by the horrors of the First and Second World Wars and the crimes of genocide, especially on European grounds.

Rationalist technology, the mass and anonymous urban agglomeration, industrial society - are all factors that have weakened human subjectivity in recent decades. Unfortunately, positivistic mentality, which has not only cut off its ties with the Christian vision of the world, but has also opted to abandon references to thinking in metaphysical and moral categories, has gained the upper hand in the natural sciences. Proof of this can be seen in the different types of architecture, different plans of the urban built environment, including religious buildings. Man lives in a world of different relations and references, which is why his life will remain a happy one only as long as these relations remain proper [3].

### 3. Secularisation and secularism

Let us look closer at these two terms: secularisation and secularism, as they function in the sphere of worldview, economy, culture, philosophy and theology. “Secularisation” is derived from the Latin word *saeculum* and denotes *a generation, a period of time, the period of a single generation or a specific age* [4]. The message of *saeculum* expresses that which is temporal, which is transient. *Saeculum* – is a term that describes the world. There is also a different term for the world, and that is *mundus*, in the sense of a place, institution or structure. Despite the fact that both terms, *saeculum* and *mundus*, were used to describe the same world, they expressed two different concepts of said world: The Greek concept – which reflects the world as a place, and the Latin concept – which shows the world as a history. Christianity, which developed in Greek categories, adopted the term *saeculum* in the sense of a location. Thus secularisation became understood as a loss of space, a retreat, a shrinkage [5].

And thus the Latin word *saecularis* is today translated as deconsecration. In the broadest meaning, it denotes a loosening of bonds with religion and the removal or freeing of something, a territory or institution, from church sovereignty or dependence. Secularisation is linked with the problems of laicisation, emancipation, dechristianisation, desacralisation, a sort of “separation from the church”, as well as demythologisation or irreligiousness. Secularisation also means a departure from institutional forms of religiousness. It is not a new phenomenon, as it constantly accompanies all religions [6]. The religiousness of Europeans, clearly marked by secularisation and secularism today, appears to be quite alien to the residents of Asia, Africa, Australia or the Americas. The processes of secularism and secularisation do not affect the Christians of those parts of the world. Nevertheless, the course of secularisation in the West has exceptionally gained in strength. This should be classified both positively and negatively [7].

Through secularism, in turn, we understand all forms of hostility – significantly generalising the definition – towards everything that is religious, and especially Christian. The sphere of secularism includes not only ideas aimed against the message of the Gospel, with atheism being at the fore, but also the active persecution of Christians, which manifests itself in various forms. The current of secularism includes two powerful forms of fundamentalism that the spiritual culture of the West is marked with today: Islamic fundamentalism and the fundamentalism of aggressive secularity [8].

A helpful differentiation between the terms “secularism” and “secularisation” was provided already by Paul VI in his *Evangelii nuntiandi* (08.12.1975). He wrote: *On the one hand one is forced to note in the very heart of this contemporary world the phenomenon which is becoming almost its most striking characteristic: secularism. We are not speaking of secularization, which is the effort, in itself just and legitimate and in no way incompatible with faith or religion, to discover in creation, in each thing or each happening in the universe, the laws which regulate them with a certain autonomy, but with the inner conviction that the Creator has placed these laws there. The last Council has in this sense affirmed the legitimate autonomy of culture and particularly of the sciences. Here we are thinking of a true secularism: a concept of the world according to which the latter is self-explanatory, without any need for recourse to God, who thus becomes superfluous and an encumbrance. This sort of secularism, in order to recognize the power of man, therefore ends up by doing without God and even by denying Him. New forms of atheism seem to flow from it: a man centred atheism, no longer abstract and metaphysical but pragmatic, systematic and militant*” [9].

To sum it up, the official Catholic position accepts the autonomy of contemporary earthly realities and the specifically understood process of the profanation of the world. Secularisation in and of itself leads to the purification of traditional religiousness, narrowed morality, institutionally excessive structures, simultaneously becoming a stimulation of the spiritual and personal dimension in forming spiritual relations with God [10]. This is why secularisation in and of itself should not be negated as such, but instead treated as a challenge.

### 4. Religions and the iconic status of Christianity

F.-X. Kaufmann observed in his *Kirchenkrise. Wie überlebt das Christentum?* that we have found ourselves in some phase of religious development marked by the departure from the ecclesiastic in

individual and social life [11]. Membership in a religious community is currently a private matter on the one hand, and – furthermore – not only in the political sense, but also in a pluralistic society. And on the other, the position of the Church on the matter of economic and social problems or its ethical and moral appeals still resonates quite astoundingly. This is because Christian churches are believed to be important representatives of public life, but not an authority in terms of private morality [12].

Because man, in his somatopsychic structure, is primarily spiritual, and thus naturally open to infinity, to something that transcends him, then he makes various efforts to meet his spiritual needs, through the pursuit of transcendence. Religious space is meant to serve him as an aid in this, one that also becomes concrete in such forms of architecture like churches, chapels, places of mediation and prayer.

What, then, is religion? What functions does it have? There are numerous definitions of religions. The Latin word *religio* is translated as “bond”. It is about the relation of man and God, but also of man with another man. Religion has a powerful integrating function, as it binds individuals into a community. We differentiate the many polytheist religions (Neohinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism or Shinto) from monotheistic ones (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). However, it appears that Judaism is a religion in a strict sense – if we assume the necessity of its revelatory character. Let us now point our attention to the difference between Judaism and Christianity in light of our subject, which is the religiousness of the residents of secularised cities, who – in the age of the symbol – expect the materiality of their faith. Without discussion, it is Christianity – thanks to the mystery of the incarnation that is at the centre of its faith – that offers the people of the age of the symbol a material and visual form of spirituality. The Hebrew Torah clearly forbids the Israelites to make any form of images, as well as their worship.

Christianity is something more than just a religion; it not only has a revelatory character, but also a personal one. With the appreciation of the subjectivity of man, his dialogic nature, Christianity is an actual meeting between man and God in human form, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus is not solely God; Jesus is not solely a man. He is both God and man. Through the mystery of the incarnation, an unheard of promotion of materiality has taken place, in opposition to Manichean or Gnostic postulates, which, like a boomerang, continue to visit human thought.

This divine materiality that Christianity has brought with it to the history of mankind thus demands a certain iconic character – an imagery. Just as Judaism did not allow the creation of any images nor depictions of Yahweh, so does Christianity – based on its central truth that is the mystery of the incarnation – clearly point to historical and material reality in the profession of its faith. Historical thinking thus requires ceaseless vigilance. This is why the followers of Christ write and paint holy paintings, build churches, create spaces for contemplation and establish places of prayer. We can thus see an immense field for the activity of architects, planners, surveyors, civil engineers, sculptors and painters. In the iconic nature of Christianity there is thus an immense opportunity for rising up to the spiritual challenges of the secularised man of the twenty-first century, who is nevertheless unchangeably open to transcendence. The Gospel is a paradigm for anti-utopia.

## 5. Discussion - Rational spirituality

Based on the above, we can arrive at the conclusion that the human person is religious and requires a transcendental reference for its full development, living in a secularised, anonymous society notwithstanding. A civilised soul is one that is interested in non-utilitarian truths. Religion also bears with it a social and institutional dimension, and thus integrates man with God, with his surroundings and with himself. However, not all religions – due to the fact that among them there are also those that are the only human and natural means to the satisfying of people’s spiritual needs – sate man in a supernatural and exhaustive way. Today, processes of sacralisation pretending to be religions occur in some fragments of the reality of lay Europe – due to the removal or the marginalisation of Judaism or Christianity. This is why we should refer to those religions that have a revelatory nature, which means that they “come from above”, instead of being a human idea. Divine revelation must lay at the foundation

of an authentic religion, instead of a human concept. It is about differentiation between “proper” religions and “pseudo religions”. The criteria here are, furthermore, authenticity and credibility [13].

Currently there are many pseudo religious offerings on the services market, offerings that have little in common with reason. How do we justify the success and popularity of occultist, luminist, numerologic, millenarianist or theosophic divagations or chiromancy, astrology and fortune telling in an age of the favouring of positivism and empiricism? Why does today's educated man understand a magic handbook better than his own neighbour? Is all of this not disparaging to postmodernity and its representatives? Interest in esoteric religiosity is, on the one hand, a confirmation of the need for spirituality and the necessity to simplify current systems of faith, while on the other a consequence of a crisis of God [14].

An illusory human feeling cannot be a foundation of faith, but that, which grows beyond man – Divine revelation. Man's existence must be characterised by rationality and his faith must be rationally verifiable [15]. This is not about the ideal of religion, but a faith that is specifically experienced by man, a faith that must face sufficient criticism and reflection. “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves” [16].

Contemporary religiosity is, unfortunately, characterised by a significant lack of rationality. Without rationality, religion becomes godlessness and religious rites become soulless gestures and symbols. True faith can only be a faith that appears unacceptable to a layman. Rationality cannot be derived from experiences associated with technical production, resultant from science. Rationality is also the result of an appropriate event of human spirituality, one when it is not only emotion and feeling that are being turned on. Robbing Christianity of its Hellenic element (Greek nous: intellect), turns it into a sect. Christianity needs to be defended not from the reductionist postulates of past and present scientism, but from Gnostic half-truth [17].

## 6. Conclusion - Ecumenical challenges being faced by Christian Churches and theology

Seeing the weaknesses and threats that result from the ideologies that are being promoted in the West, we must also critically address the general situation regarding the Church. It appears that Churches also find themselves unable to rise up to the task at hand. It is sufficient to point to the saddening divisions among Christians, which are a clear contradiction of unity, which Jesus himself prayed for (cf. J 17).

Christian churches must show a greater care for the spiritual and mystical elements, for contemplation and pneumatics. The magisterium of the Church does not create the life of the faithful, but only sanctions it. The tension between the charism and institutionality is not meant to lead to a removal of the ecclesial structure, but to changes within it. In order for Churches to be able to reform the world, they must themselves ceaselessly undertake reform within themselves. However, the ancient principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda* cannot be understood superficially, being reduced only to institutional reform. According to the principle of the constantly reforming Church, the changes in thinking and in the actions of Christians are what counts. What is the difference between a true and a false reform of the Church? The community of the faithful, framed into institutional forms, requires not only additional forms of activism, but the worship of God. The true reform of the Church is not “its” change, but a change “within it”, which means the purification of its depth, reinforcing faith within its interior, as the Church is not only human, but divine as well. The appropriate reform of the Church resembles the work of a sculptor, who removes that which is unnecessary, which is inauthentic, in order to reveal the noble form (*nobilis forma*) hidden to the eye, which is the entire undisturbed beauty of the face of Christ, which is meant to shine in His followers [18].

What tasks are there for theology? From among the many difficult challenges, theology must play the part of the critical truth inside the church community, as well as preach the revealing God, who seeks man, outside of it. It must inspire hope that reaches beyond human thought. Theologians today are being limited both by the hierarchical structures of their Churches and by popular piety, associated more with tradition and folklore rather than with the actual truths of faith. This is why theology rebels not against

Divine will – as it is much too hastily being branded by some – but against its instrumentalisation, as well as against elements that people dare to attribute to God. Dogmatism in and of itself must also be subjected to constant critical revision. Let us perfect the boldness of our thinking. Unfortunately, much of the hierarchy has entered the sphere of political systems, material connections, economic dependencies and pays too little attention to the spiritual dimensions of the Kingdom of God, about which Christ taught.

As a part of the redevelopment of excessive institutionalisation, we should pay more attention to the centres of spirituality, which should be linked with monastic orders or religious renewal movements. The sound of a monastery bell penetrates into those regions of the soul that are not reached by noise or franticness. In this sphere there appears to be a broad field for the activity of contemporary architects to search for new forms and create places of meeting new spirituality. This would mean both ecumenical places of the convivance of reconciled Christians, as well as movements of church renewal.

Church renewal movements that introduce the potential of the charism, joy and youth into the public, cultural and spiritual life of the West give us hope. These movements are very numerous nowadays, there are some that work only inside certain Christian churches, but there are also supra-confessional ones. Let us mention the ecumenical movement of the Taizé community, which, during its yearly meetings of tens of thousands of young Christians that take place in one of Europe's cities, renews and transforms the Church's mentality. We will mention the Catholic movements that have made themselves known in many countries, for instance: The Neocatechumenal Way (K. Argüello, C. Hernández), *Communione e Liberazione* (L. Giussani), *Focolari* (Ch. Lubich), *Ruch Rodzin Nazaretańskich* (T. Dajczner), *Ruch oazowy* (F. Blachnicki) and many others [19].

However, prayer is what is appropriate for Churches. The renewal of Europe begins in liturgy, when believers gather to worship God. The Holy Spirit then works specifically and exceptionally. To Ratzinger, the appropriate place and source of the renewal of the Church and its paradigm is liturgy itself, something which he expressed in almost all of his books. Liturgy is, above all, the work of not only people, but of Jesus Christ himself, who along with his followers offers his worship to God in a reality of the holy and sinful Church. Liturgy has in it not only a universal cosmic dimension, but is personal and existential, as it plays out inside man [20].

With liturgy comes music, whose role and significance cannot be understated. Music is a language of unity, understood by all. Its expiatory, worshipping, purifying, elevating, meditative function still remains insufficiently appreciated. How can we forget about the powerful force that inspires human genius, which flows from faith, and provides inspiration to composers, singers, painters, poets, the authors of literary works or other artists. "That which can only be a nostalgically admired testament of the past, in liturgy appears to be a constantly revived present" [21]. Joy in God and the experience of his presence in liturgy constitutes an inexhaustible force of inspiration even today, an inspiration that Christians want to share with all the residents of Europe [22]

## References

- [1] N.G. Dávila. Nowe scholia do tekstu implicate. New scholia for implicit text. W arszawa: Furta sacra, 2009. 2, p. 50.
- [2] J. Ratzinger / Benedict XVI. Jezus z Nazaretu. Cz. I: Od chrztu w Jordanie do Przemienienia. From the baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration, Kraków: 2007, p. 38.
- [3] J. Ratzinger. Sól ziemi. Chrześcijaństwo i Kościół katolicki na przełomie tysiącleci, Salt of the earth. Christianity and the Catholic Church at the turn of the millennium, Kraków, 1997. p. 19.
- [4] A. Draguła. Ocalić Boga. Szkice z teologii sekularyzacji. Save God. Sketches in secularization theology, Warszawa, 2010, pp. 11–12.
- [5] A. Draguła. Ocalić Boga. Szkice z teologii sekularyzacji. Save God. Sketches in secularization theology. Warszawa, 2010,
- [6] J. Mariański. „Sekularyzacja”. In: Editor M. Rusecki et al., Leksykon teologii fundamentalnej. Lexicon of fundamental theology, Lublin-Kraków, 2002. pp. 1089–1092.

- [7] A. Napiórkowski. Współczesny Kościół i ponowoczesny świat, Kraków, 2015. pp. 147-148.
- [8] A. Napiórkowski. Proegzystencja Kościoła, Kraków, 2018. pp. 14-20.
- [9] Paul VI, Evangelii nuntiandi apostolic adhortation, Vatican 1975. (55).
- [10] A. Napiórkowski. Współczesny Kościół i ponowoczesny świat, Kraków, 2015. pp. 162-167.
- [11] F.-X. Kaufmann. Kirchenkrise. Wie überlebt das Christentum?, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2000, p. 96.
- [12] A. Napiórkowski. The Divine-Human Communion. An Outline of Catholic Integral Ecclesiology, Frankfurt a.M. 2015. pp. 37-47.
- [13] M. Rusecki. „Objawienie Boże podstawą religii”, Teologia religii. Chrześcijański punkt widzenia, Łódź - Kraków 2007. pp. 157-182.
- [14] J. Ratzinger. Bóg i świat, God and the world, Kraków 2005, p. 25.
- [15] J. Ratzinger. Bóg i świat, God and the world, Kraków 2005. pp. 25-27; A. Napiórkowski, Jezus Chrystus objawiony i objawiający, Kraków, 2016, p. 33-43; p. 125-158.
- [16] John Paul II. encyclical Fides et ratio, Introduction.
- [17] N.G. Dávila, Nowe scholia do tekstu implicate, p. 48.
- [18] A. Napiórkowski. Reforma i rozwój Kościoła. Duch Boży i instytucja, Reform and development of the Church. God's Spirit and institution, Kraków, 2012. pp. 171-176; T. M. Dąbek. Poznajemy oblicze Chrystusa przez Maryję, Kraków, 2002. iss.20, 21, 24.
- [19] A. Napiórkowski. The Divine-Human Communion, p. 391-396.
- [20] J. Ratzinger. Duch liturgii. The spirit of the liturgy, Poznań, 2002. pp. 24-33.
- [21] J. Ratzinger. Duch liturgii. The spirit of the liturgy, Poznań, 2002. p. 139.
- [22] J. Ratzinger. Duch liturgii. The spirit of the liturgy, Poznań, 2002. pp. 123-140.