



ALEXANDER KYRLEZHEV

A Post-Secular Conceptualization of Religion: Defining the Question

Translation by Allison Rockwell

Alexander Kyrlezhev – Consultant of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow, Russia). kyrlezhev@gmail.com

This piece lays out a new conception of religion applicable to contemporary post-secular conditions. In these conditions, neither the secular model of religion, typical of modernity, nor the pre-secular understanding of religion/religiosity comports with sociocultural reality. The article emphasizes that the secular understanding of pre-modern religion distorts religion's nature by allotting it a fixed and therefore limited place in line with the idea and practice of functional differentiation typical of modern European societies. In this way the article unpacks the "hidden" worldview behind secularism as an ideology. Kyrlezhev suggests that this conception should be replaced by one in which the "religious" is regarded as one pole of a bipolar sociocultural whole (the other being the "eternal" secular) and that the benefit of this model is that it can be applied to various historical periods and sociocultural settings.

Keywords: religion, worldview, secular, secularism, functional differentiation, post-secularism.

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SECULARIZATION is comprised of two main components: ideology and pragmatics. The ideological component of secularization posits that, unlike the old, pre-secular world, which was fully permeated with religion, a new world is advancing, a world that is gradually freeing itself from religion as from a sort of “illusion” (a process that Weber called the “disenchantment” of the world). The philosophical foundation of this secular ideology (secularism) is the belief that the world is intrinsically and entirely immanent; that is, it is closed in upon itself. From this point of view, any representation of the transcendent is something invented, added, and therefore artificial, whereas the reality of the world as such is natural, and in this sense is something man simply takes for granted and with which he must interact without any entreaty to a transcendent Other. Accordingly, if the world of the universe (*kosmos*) has no “second floor,” nothing external, no other dimensions beyond those encountered through direct experience (and it is specifically such dimensions that religion usually references), then the world of society (*societas*) should be fundamentally non-religious in nature; that is, its construction, its “madness,” should not be connected with religious meaning. Thus, the main ideological basis for secularization is an understanding of the secular as such; that is, the understanding of a semantic space that is completely free from the religious as from something superfluous.

Accordingly, the pragmatic component of secularization consists of the organization of social life in accordance with immanent, autonomous laws and rules. The world of society is understood in this case as an aggregate of specialized, “professional” spheres of life activity, interacting within a single public space while preserving conformity to its own internal laws (what is known as functional differentiation). In this picture of an internally differentiated sociocultural whole, there is room even for religion, which is assigned to a particular area alongside other areas, such as the artistic or political. In principle, religion is not forbidden, nor even repressed. Rather, religion is localized according to the general law of sociocultural differentiation, which does not deprive it of the opportunity to interact with other autonomous sectors of life activity. At the same time, as just one sector in the sphere of social life, it becomes isolated and confined to its specific borders, and therefore cannot penetrate other areas and impose itself as the requisite measure of those life activities. The world of society as a whole is secular and essentially non-religious.

It is quite obvious that the process of secularization has given rise to a particular concept or model of religion. This is an essentially new model that did not exist, and could not have existed, in pre-secular societies and cultures, where religion was not isolated from other sociocultural phenomena, but rather diffusely connected with them, so that these other phenomena necessarily had some religious dimension. The penetration of religion into every pore of social and individual life in the pre-secular context hardly needs specific substantiation here, as it is well known from history.¹ Indeed, the process of secularization itself gives witness to this reality from the opposite angle as it is associated with the gradual liberation of various and, subsequently, practically all, subsystems of society from religious custody, while religion is simultaneously relegated to a strictly defined, “purely religious” sphere in the life and activity of individuals and their private communities.

It seems clear, therefore, that there are two mutually exclusive “models” of religion: the pre-secular and the secular. Historically, at least in the European cultural context, the replacement of the old model with the new was accompanied by a struggle: secularism advanced, strengthening its onslaught, whilst religion desperately resisted until it was forced to acquiesce to the new state of affairs. This “acquiescence” was simultaneously pragmatic and ideological, but was certainly acquiescence, since the new model of religion, imposed upon it from without by secularism, could in no way be harmonized with the long-held religious traditions that had formed and reached their peak in the pre-secular epoch. Examples of such “harmonizing” from the religious point of view (say, in the spirit of Bonhoeffer’s “non-religious Christianity,” or “the theology of the death of God,” to take the most extreme examples) are in no way representative of the entire religious field, and today must be acknowledged merely as special cases of the self-determination of religion in the secular context of the 20th century.

There is, however, an approach that, on the one hand, might obscure the problem of the mutual exclusivity of the two models of religion, yet, on the other hand can facilitate its elucidation: this is the formulation

1. Everything that from the modern European secularist point of view is seen as “non-religious” or “profane” in pre-secular cultures (say certain economic, aesthetic, and even political texts that supposedly reflect the presence of differentiated spheres of life activity, including intellectual life that is “free of religion”) existed within the general confines of the religious universe and therefore, one way or another, was included in “the religious.”

of a general question regarding the relationship between the religious and the secular.

It is a difficult question. If it is asked in a general, theoretical way, rather than a specific, historic one, then its very posing explains much, since it is assumed *a priori* that secularism as such has always existed, that the secular possesses a sort of eternal and universal “essence.” The consequence of this is another *a priori* assumption: that the second term, the religious, also denotes some particular “essence,” distinct from the secular and either external or opposite to it. As a result, a fundamental and universal cultural schema for all times and cultural contexts arises, one in which two elements of different natures coexist. These elements can in some way be associated and even interact with one another, but, like water and oil, they cannot mix. Thus, the very posing of an abstract, theoretical question about the relationship between the secular and the religious is imbued with the secular representation of religion briefly described above.

The second difficulty with regard to this question lies in the fact that the verity of the theoretical approach is usually founded on specific historical examples from the distant pre-secular past — examples that are designed to show that even “ancient man,” in addition to the sacred sphere, lived in a secular, “natural” space of life, essentially indistinguishable from the life of modern man in the secular epoch. The secularist logic is thus: religion/religiosity has always existed as something with an identifiable quality, distinct from that which is not properly religious; even in pre-modern, pre-secular societies and cultures, for example, one can distinguish religious and non-religious authority. If these two authorities are occasionally combined in one person, then this constitutes a union of distinct elements. Examples include the Pope, the Caliph, and the Bishop of Montenegro. Or another example of secularist logic: a single activity — the kissing of the cross by an ancient Russian prince — supposedly had different meanings: a purely religious one when the prince kissed the cross after the liturgy, and an essentially secular one when it was a political gesture, a sign of reconciliation between principalities.

The problem, however, is that as persuasive as it may seem, this line of argument proves nothing. Specifically, it can “prove” opposing claims depending on whichever model of religion is assumed. If one uses the secular model of *separateness* of religion, then the kissing of the cross by the ancient Russian prince in two different situations proves the different natures of the religious and the secular. If one uses the pre-secular model of *diffuseness* of religion, then this same

example will demonstrate the opposite: power and politics were at that time inseparable from religion. In other words, historical examples are not arguments in and of themselves, but subject to interpretation within a general conception of religion.

At the same time, both the posing of this question regarding the theoretical relationship between the religious and the secular and the above examples are completely appropriate and useful, since otherwise there is no way to make sense of the mutually exclusive nature of the models of religion discussed above. We can deal with this conundrum under one condition: when the definition of “religious” is clear.

According to the secularist understanding, religion is one of the artificial spheres, a specific product of cultural creation, something fabricated, a “charm” that envelops the individual person’s and society’s essentially natural and secular life activities. If these charms are “broken,” what remains is “simply being-in-the-world” (*In-der-Welt-sein*). Correspondingly, one can retrospectively remove religious charms from, say, ancient politics, so that “just politics” remains (applied to the example given above, there is only feudal disunity and princely infighting, which should be distinguished from the supernumerary “religious” aspect).

However, it is also possible to examine these phenomena from another point of view. We can consider that which in the secular context has come to be called the *worldview* in relation to medieval actors, both “secular” and “religious.” In their day, everyone’s worldview was religious (there was no other worldview, or it existed only in quiet exceptions), and this means that the source of political power was God perceived as transcendent to the world. Therefore the distinction between secular authority and specifically religious (ecclesiastical) authority was not fundamental, but hierarchical and functional, occurring within a religious understanding of authority proper.²

Thus, it is simply impossible to separate the religious from the secular (in this case, regarding authority and politics) in accordance with the secular separationist model: religion in the pre-secular context was fundamentally diffuse, *despite the fact* that a so-called purely religious sphere of life (e.g. the worship service) existed. But this brings up a legitimate question: if the “purely religious” did, in fact, exist, then how can it be distinguished; that is, how can it be correlated to that which was not purely religious? After all, otherwise that which

2. This allowed for the possibility of varying approaches to authority, differing in configuration but unified in essence: take the Pope’s authority over the emperor, for example, as compared with Joseph Volotsky’s continuum of authority: God, the tsar, the bishops.

comprised “religion” in pre-secular culture would be indistinguishable, and thus it would be impossible to pinpoint exactly what was separated into a special sphere in the process of secularization.

The situation is thus very delicate. In order to answer the modern question about the relationship between the religious and the secular, the modern (secular) formulation of this question cannot be ignored, nor can the fact that this secular formulation, defined by a secular conception of religion, is irrelevant to the pre-secular reality of religion, and therefore distorts religion itself, along with its long history. In other words, we must answer a different question: what, precisely, is religion? How can it be adequately defined?

However, we encounter a problem in the fact that in the pre-secular history of religion (here we are concerned with Christianity in particular, since it is specifically within the European Christian context that the “classic” process of secularization takes place) we find no definition of religion that meets the modern, scientific standards required of a definition. After all, to define a phenomenon means to isolate it, to make it an object of knowledge separate from other phenomena and, through its juxtaposition with those other phenomena, to identify what makes its “essence” particular, in distinction to the “essences” of other phenomena. In order to define religion itself, it must be separated from other areas of the differentiated whole of society, particularly from politics. But how is it possible to separate pre-secular religion from politics? For example, early Christians were law-abiding in principle, yet refused to observe certain legally prescribed state ceremonies to the point of martyrdom: this is a clear intermingling of the religious and the political. To provide another example, both of these later “commandments” were religious: “Honor God as the Tsar of Heaven” and “Honor the Tsar as God’s servant on earth.” In fact, in general, the Christianization of the ancient pagan world relates simultaneously to both religious and political history, to the history of ideas and the history of daily life.

One can, of course, following the traditional secular approach of religious studies, point to doctrinal dogmas, church hierarchy, acts of worship, the practice of prayer and related psychological experiences as the intrinsically or “purely” religious. However, since these religious elements in the pre-secular epoch were an integral part of the whole of individual and social life, highlighting these distinct elements does not constitute a definition of the object or phenomenon of religion, but rather a distortion of the true role of religion in life and culture. This distortion is a product of using the modern secular model of religion as a lens through which to study and describe religion in the pre-secular era.

There is only one way out of this situation: to establish a new conception, or model, of religion, which, on the basis of the aforementioned, will be *post-secular*. This conception must take into consideration the actual pre-secular history of religion, and at the same time stand in contrast with the model of religion constructed during the secularization process in both its ideological and pragmatic aspects. In other words, the new, post-secular model of religion anticipates a conceptualization of pre-secular religion and “the religious” against a background of vigorous disagreement with the secular conception.

The use of the secular approach (that of religious studies and sociology) to describe and define modern religion is based on an understanding of a distinct “religious sphere,” which is itself still further differentiated. In social space, this sphere involves the voluntary religious associations of citizens; individually, it involves the experience of religious psychology; performatively, it involves religious worship and rituals; and ideologically, it involves a religious worldview. Hence, the religious is marked as a specific life activity, as *in general* a subclass of, respectively, the classes of voluntary association, psychology, performance, and worldview in general. In each case, the religious is an addition, inasmuch as it is understood as superfluous in relation to the natural and secular. Aggregately, religion is presented as a cluster of these individual and social activities with a corresponding infrastructure, a cluster that comprises one of many societal subsystems, or sectors, of a sociocultural whole. Furthermore, this approach is extended to pre-secular (or non-secular) culture, interpreting the religious as a particular “vestment” of the natural and secular, which have not yet freed themselves from religious custody.

In reality, however, in pre-secular culture, the natural and secular instead correspond to that which can be called the natural and religious. There, religiousness is taken for granted as the “natural” state of the individual and society, and as a rule, the only debate is over the truth or falsehood of a particular religion, its universal (Christianity, Islam) or local character, whether it is one’s own or alien (“paganism” is the religion of “tongues,” of different tribes and peoples).³ Thus, pre-secular culture, in contrast to modern secular religious studies, has no notion of “religion in general” but only of true

3. This statement refers to the etymological relationship between the Russian word for paganism, “iazychestvo,” and the Russian word for tongue, “iazyk.” The Latin root for the English word “paganism” actually means “rural person” or “villager.” — The editors.

or false worship, veneration of one's own gods or foreign ones. In this sense, false worship or participation in foreign rituals is not "religion" at all, but a rejection of religion, religious betrayal.

Thus, with respect to religion there arise two interpretations of the "natural" that differ to the point of complete contradiction, and two interpretations of what can be added to the natural as something self-evident. If one takes into consideration both the pre-secular and secular understandings of religiousness, the following view on the relationship between the religious and the nonreligious (secular) can be proposed: they constitute *two poles* of individual and societal existence. In this case, what is understood as "natural" is the cumulative life activities of "man and people," which flow along an ideological and pragmatic plane of tension between the religious and the secular poles of culture.

The religious pole comprises the "purely religious," which is easily recognizable in practically all cultures. The opposing, secular pole comprises the pragmatic and this-worldly, all that is related to the very processes of living and surviving; in other words, it is *conatus*, or the "biological" (pre-cultural *in the logical sense*). Accordingly, when speaking about *culture* (in the most general sense), it is defined on the one hand by the religious pole, or the quasi-religious pole (on which see below), and on the other hand by the opposing, "biological" pole.

Here reference must be made to that intuitive truth that is present in the secular model of religion and culture. In relegating religion to a distinct sector of individual and societal life, proponents of this model have by the same token rejected the absolutization of the secular as such. Even if this was done for specific historical or pragmatic reasons, the result is the same. The modern *philosophy* of the secular has not been consistently thought through to the end. The secular conception of religion did not repudiate, but rather acknowledged and validated the *uniqueness* of the religious, recognizing religion as something possessing its own separate "essence" that nothing can replace. This truth has both pragmatic and ideological dimensions, since it is related to the liberal idea that freedom of choice, including choice of worldview, is an inalienable individual right.

At the same time, this incidental truth is in a sense accidental. Secularism as an ideology (and as "philosophy") undeniably presupposes the total disappearance of religion, the complete "disenchantment" of the world, the liberation of the person and humanity from every kind of enchantment, but above all from religious ones. Secularism's principle of freedom of religion is tied not to the maintenance of religious choice, but to the pathos of non-violence, since, according

to the ideology of modernism, to know and understand the world as it is known and understood by secularism, that is in its natural, this-worldly capacity, can be done only by “freely” recognizing the natural as truly natural, accepting the self-sufficiency of the natural as the truth of the world itself. Violence in this case is simply irrelevant, for this truth is revealed as obvious, is a kind of “revelation” subsequently confirmed by experience. And revelation can be violent only in the sense of the violence of the fact, of the true state of things.

In its logical, semantic aspect, religion is concerned with the ultimate ontological foundations of the world and humanity. But secularism as an ideology, by displacing religion from the sociocultural universe, not only pursues the removal of religious “charms” from culture, but as a consequence also creates a situation in which some other, non-religious (i.e. secular) cultural authorities are called to, and even must, engage with the question of the ultimate ontological foundations of the world and humanity. These cultural authorities are post-theological spheres of knowledge and thinking: secular philosophy and secular science (and indirectly “secular” literature and art in their logical dimensions). In other words, in confining religion to its allotted sphere, secularism farms out inherently religious questions to areas of the sociocultural universe that are by definition external to religion.

Thus, secularism acts as a substitute for religion, and thereby discovers its own quasi-religious features. In the new secular reality, secularism is the pole standing opposite the “biological” (logically pre-cultural) pole of life, and in this capacity it turns out to be just as diffuse as religion was in the pre-secular situation: it pervades everything, every sector of the functionally differentiated sociocultural whole. In short, it assumes the old function of religion in the new post-religious culture.

To avoid misunderstandings, it bears repeating: secularism does not destroy religion, does not drive it out completely, and does not replace it; the strictest atheistic secularist regimes are the exceptions that prove the rule. Moreover, secularism as an ideology and as a practice (secularization) not only permits, but logically implies contact and mutual exchange between the sectors of secular culture, for example, between literature or art and religion, or between philosophy and religion, and not only retrospectively, but currently. The religious can penetrate other cultural spheres, but not diffusely; that is, it cannot penetrate in such a way so as to logically define them. These other spheres remain autonomous and essentially secular. Religion in this

case acts merely as an “interlocutor” and as “leftover cultural material,” and not as a sociocultural pole.

This fact has important consequences. Religion is a pole of culture, but when another, *quasi*-religious secular authority arises alongside the actual religious authority, the religious pole bifurcates. In secular culture, religion’s function as a cultural pole is fulfilled simultaneously by religion as such, which appears in its “pure” form in just such a culture, and by secular ideology and practice, which provide a substitute for religion in a totally secular world.

Here arises an important point that must be emphasized: no matter how paradoxical it may seem, the very “theory and practice” of secularism — in a secular age as yet maintained by inertia — sheds light on pre-secular religion.

In contrast to that which was recognized as secular in pre-secular culture and which must be identified with the “biological/pragmatic” pole (*conatus*), the modern secular functionally replaces old religion; that is, it becomes typologically the “religious” pole of culture, that absolutely diffuse principle that, even having a “material” expression (worldview and values), acts in the culture as an all-pervasive logical force, influencing the entire field of polar tension, the entire sociocultural universe. This is a universal, but “incorporeal” principle, for it is merely a *quality* conceptually ascribed to, and prescribed by, every cultural phenomenon, with the exception of “religion proper.”

To reiterate the main thesis: from a sociological point of view religion is a requisite pole of culture understood as the sphere of the artificial or “man-made.” It is a pole in the sense of being a “source” of views about the ultimate ontological foundations of the world and humanity, which give rise to corresponding individual and societal practices. Religion proper is not the only thing that can act as such a pole; for example, so might ancient philosophies, which also fulfilled a religious function and which represented a kind of proto-secularist phenomenon, at least from the perspective of medieval European Christianity. In any case, as a sociocultural pole, the “place of religion” is indestructible.

Secularism splits this topos of the religious, but splits it asymmetrically, since it leaves to religion proper (with its inherent totality and diffuseness) the limited sphere of a social subsystem (in the best case), while secularism becomes the carrier of universal, all-determining, quasi-religious meaning.⁴

4. And even the Albanian secularism of the Communist era, pushed to its theoretical and practical limits, succeeded only in repressing religion to the “social subconscious.”

The quasi-religious — in the sense of constituting a second functionally religious pole — “essence” of secularism is particularly obvious in the secular understanding of the communal and the personal, or the public and the private. In short, secularism leads to a paradoxical universalization of the private. In the pre-secular context, the private was connected to the public as one side of a coin is to the other. In the secular context, the unit of the private is the individual as a “physical person,” which, though necessarily related to the public, retains fundamental autonomy.⁵

Here again we run up against secularism’s concession to religion. If the individual as an autonomous subject represents the fundamental value and primary social element, then the purely religious pole is in no way repressed: in the space of the individual’s “lifeworld,” religious influence is left with complete freedom. However, it is left on just “one side of the coin,” as the other, “public” side of the coin is absolutely and completely in the sphere of secular quasi-religion, inasmuch as the communal is “cleansed” of the religious (as described in the term “secular society”). Therefore “the social” as the common represents the cumulative effect of the interaction between individual-private units, taken in their “external” projection into a principally secular space.

Thus, the universalization of the private as the individual is a means of divorcing the two functionally religious poles: the individual, facing away from the public, may freely engage with the purely religious pole in his life activities; however, in facing toward the public, he finds himself in a different field of polar tension — between the “religious” and the “secular,” where secularism itself acts as the religious pole.

The instrument of this separation is “human rights,” including the foundational — both in the historical sense and with respect to terminology — right to the freedom of religious confession as a freedom of the individual conscience, that is, the right of a “private” individual to accept and share with others any answer to the question of the ultimate ontological foundations of the world and humanity. In other words, the universalization of the private represents a rejection of universally meaningful (supra-individual) values and the transfer of universality to instrumental or procedural values that are simultaneously individual and common.

5. Perhaps this is that very “man” who, according to Foucault, was invented comparatively recently, but is now dead or dying...

This important point is directly related to secularism's status as quasi-religion, not just in its function, but also in its content.

Privatization — the transfer of the search for answers to typologically religious, or religious-philosophical, questions about the ultimate ontological foundations of the world and humanity (answers that will in turn give rise to particular practices) to the competence of the individual and groups or communities of individuals — means that secularism refuses on principle to provide any substantive answers to such questions. At first glance, this very refusal must bear witness to the *secular* character of secularism, its substantive *neutrality* (*epoché*, so to speak); that is, secularism does not impose any kind of general *worldview*, but, on the contrary, establishes the conditions for the existence of many and various worldviews within the bounds of legitimate individual-private and individual-private-group creativity/commitment. That is, secularism acts as a fundamentally instrumental ideology, as a universal procedure, the primary goal of which is to remove and prevent conflict between concrete worldviews. This in turn must mean that secularism itself has no relation to *worldview* as such; that secularism, so to speak, is entirely procedural, which is why it is not substantively universal but specifically instrumentally universal.

However, secularism is *not* entirely procedural. Procedure, by definition, implies work with some kind of content, some “material”; strictly speaking, this is the *raison d'être* of procedure. Procedure is formalism, and it is universal specifically in a “formalist” sense. Substantive universalism is on a completely different plane than procedural universalism. However, if procedure as such proves to be the *only* expression of universalism, as is the case in modern secularism, then this indicates a repression of universal content as such. By insisting on its neutrality towards any particular worldview, secularism acts principally as a fundamentally content-less ideology, as a mere “tool box.” But this in and of itself conveys nothing about secularism, which, as seen above, in fact acts as a functional substitute for religion, as a generator of implicit answers to inquiries about the ontological foundations of the world and humanity.

The alleged and/or proclaimed instrumentality of secularism is illusory specifically by virtue of the fact that it accents its proceduralism in those situations where there is no, and cannot be any, universally shared *content*: all worldviews, including religious and philosophical ones, are by definition personal, private and without any general cultural significance. But if instrumentality has no material referent,

it ceases to be instrumentalism. This means that a “solitary,” or self-sufficient, instrumentality must have a hidden, implicit substantive referent, for the idea of an instrument without material to act upon is absurd indeed.

It is, in fact, a specific *worldview*, operating behind a mask of neutrality, that comprises the “material” for secularist instrumentalism. This worldview presupposes particular answers to the question of the ultimate ontological foundations of the world and humanity. This worldview must be reconstructed, since secularism avoids articulating it itself.

Particular secularists might define their worldview as “humanism” in its various forms. But secularism as a quasi-religious ideology, having accumulated the “views” of many particular secularists along with the diverse effects of the long-running process of secularization, is not synonymous with any particular modern European “humanistic worldview” (some of which have not been exterior to, opposed to, or intended to replace religion).

“Secularist worldview” here specifically means a sort of cumulative, implicit worldview that functions as a dominant ideology in secular culture as a whole; that is, in a culture whose poles are comprised of quasi-*religious* secularism and the eternal, *secular*, pragmatic *conatus*. Such a cumulative and concurrently socially dominant worldview is in direct contradiction to secularism’s own understanding of legitimate, private worldviews. This is secularism’s sore spot, and it simultaneously reveals its quasi-religiousness. From the secularist perspective, “legitimate” worldviews are always private; that is, they are principally limited regarding their general or societal significance. But the worldview that is distinguishable as a background, or the substantive and ideological foundation of secularism itself, is a typologically religious worldview. It is, so to speak, a “catholic” (*sobornoe*) worldview, possessing authority not by virtue of “pure logic” or by the observance of particular formal authoritative or ideological procedures, but specifically by virtue of a very real *dominance* in the general sociocultural space, which, functionally speaking, is essentially identical to the domination of religion proper in the conditions of the “old cultural regime.”

What is at the heart of this hidden secularist worldview, this *deus absconditus* of secularism? Its essence lies in the raising of the self-sufficiency, or immanence, of the world and humanity to the rank of a typologically religious truth. This relates specifically to: (1) the absolutization of the being/presence of the individual, and, as a

logical consequence, (2) the absolutization of the proceduralism of this being/presence.

Secularism is a “religion” to the extent that, acting in the public sphere as a replacement for religion itself (which is already locked away in a separate, autonomous sphere), by means of various authorities representing different sectors of the secular sociocultural whole, directly or indirectly answers questions about the ultimate ontological foundations of the world and humanity and, as a result, forms and inculcates those individual and social practices that correspond to these answers — from the daily to the political — as hegemonic. Its answer: there is no “God” except for determinate existence, given to a person through his perceptions and direct, spontaneous experience. Accordingly, prophecies about this “secular God” can only be recommendations, made with the use of appropriate tools, related to the effective pragmatics of existence in a one-dimensional world.

The “religiousness” of secularism — that is, the religious function that it “consciously,” indeed, one might say honestly and responsibly, took on after the ghettoization of religion proper — consists of providing an ultimate, perhaps even a metaphysical, quasi-transcendental meaning of the determinate being of the world and humanity, including human community.

Here we come up against what can be called the philosophical *naïveté* of secularism as an answer to ultimate religious-philosophical questions. This naïveté is connected with the problem of any immanentism, including atheism, as an anti-religious ideology: the world as a determinate sphere of existence has logical boundaries; the world’s boundaries exist because there is no boundlessness (infinity) in our personal experience. At the same time, the existence of boundaries suggests that there is a beyond. Thus, a rejection of the transcendent is only a pseudo-answer to the question of the transcendent and the immanent. The idea of immanence is possible only in conjunction with the idea of transcendence, and an emphasis on immanence as an absolute is also a metaphysical position that corresponds to a particular worldview.

The positive secular-scientific “picture of the world” doesn’t remove the problem of the immanent and transcendent, because the problem itself is “transcendent to” modern science which is post-theological and, in some sense, post-philosophical. For philosophy cannot avoid the problem of the transcendent without becoming “modern science.” In turn, the specific psychology of “man and people” cannot ignore the

limit of mortality, which, despite any “rational theorem,” points to the problem of the boundaries of existence.

Secularism, in contrast to religion proper, distances itself on principle from philosophy and ultimate questions. The distinction between secularism as quasi-religion and religion proper is important. In functioning in a modern, self-established context as “religion,” by virtue of a principled rejection of meaningful content (“neutrality”) in favor of instrumentalism (“pragmatic utility”), secularism also rejects any weighty philosophical component. Specifically, it accepts only social and political philosophy as its philosophical component. This is very revealing: secularism works only with social pragmatics — that is, only with those segments of philosophical thought that are concerned with questions that are immanent and of-this-world. It in no way thematizes or problematizes what are essentially forbidden “religious-philosophical” questions.

The conclusion presents itself: secularism as a quasi-religion has fallen into a “religious” trap. Having taken upon itself in the modern “secular world” a function formerly fulfilled by old religion, but at the same time logically and honestly leaving religion as religion to its separate sphere, secularism itself has created the conditions for the future transition to a “post-secular world,” a world in which religion will be ideologically and pragmatically restored to its rights, that is, released from the ghetto, while secularism’s functional and logical pseudo-religiousness will become an object of critical analysis, as will its worldview bias. If this does not unmask secularism’s declared neutrality, it will at least call it into question.

This is precisely the logical error of secularism as an ideology and a practice. The secularism that split the religious pole when it offered itself as a replacement for religion in the name of establishing an irreligious future for humanity demands that we today, after comprehending secularism’s logical error, seek a new understanding of religion that is consonant with contemporary religious and societal processes in various contexts, both local and global. The foundation of such a conception could be the idea presented herein of religion’s polarity, which can be summarized in the following way.

Sociologically, religion must be understood first and foremost as a sociocultural pole; accordingly, the other pole represents some kind of non-religious “principle,” which can be called secular. Each pole, as one of the “principles,” establishes with the other pole a field of tension resulting in a certain dynamic, and is not a “sphere,” “space,”

or “domain.” Therefore the totality and diffuseness of religion must be understood as a consequence of its polarity: each of the field of tension’s poles acts upon the field “with totality,” precisely as a pole, encountering and energetically interacting with the energy and influence of the other pole. In other words, the entire field of tension is totally and diffusely “permeated” with “the religious” on one side and “the secular” on the other. It is important in this theoretical approach that the “secular” (not in the secularist sense) is not in any way repressed, and that asymmetry does not arise. Rather, it proves to be the “eternal secular,” since it is an indispensable constituent element of the dynamic structure of the cultural whole. In the same way, the “religious” is not repressed, for a *pole* cannot be imprisoned in a ghetto. This model applies to every cultural situation, whether the pre-secular and non-secular, the secular, or the post-secular.

The development and specification of this proposed conceptual approach will require further effort and appropriate articulation.