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THE "POST-SECULAR" ERA

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With the completion of the process of secularization within the Jewish people, it is now clear that secularism is no substitute for religion. Despite the influence of materialism and the unprecedented control of man over nature and over himself, the need for religion has intensified due to continuing moral, social, and spiritual-existential problems and the profound human need for a connection with the sources, and for continuity and permanence. The time has come for the representatives of religious and secularist movements to begin a substantive dialogue that will enable creative life together.

The Conclusion of the Secularization Process

If any ideology in present-day Israel may be defined as secular in terms of its essential content, it is the ideology known as "post-Zionism." Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, Zionism constituted a central ideology in the process of secularization of the Jewish people over recent generations. This is true not only of those Zionist parties that defined themselves as secular (or "free"), but also of religious Zionism, which adopted a positive stance toward modernization in education, employment, and culture. Indeed, prior to World War II, modernization and secularization were perceived as synonymous.

The emergence in the present day of an ideology that places itself "beyond"

Zionism, constituting the Israeli manifestation of that "postmodernist" ideology that strives to achieve "globalization," underscores the reality that the process of secularization has overcome its opponents and achieved its objectives. Yet "post-Zionism" also constitutes a form of defense against those movements that cling to "yesterday" and are dissatisfied with the current situation, whether because they view the status quo as the defeat of their own world view or because, despite their positive attitude toward modernization, its current achievements are not those for which they hoped.

If this description of reality is true -- and we shall examine this in greater depth below -- it demands, at the least, a recognition that the secularization of the Jewish people and their active integration into Western culture has reached its conclusion. Accordingly, the agenda to be discussed now changes. The old words are still used, but everyone involved senses that these now relate to a different reality, with different hopes and fears, and in this context the old words lack sufficient clarity. This obstacle hampers objective and constructive discussion; the first step in overcoming this barrier is to internalize the reality that the "secularism" or "modernity" whose meaning and value are under discussion can no longer be viewed as an ideology that may be either implemented or avoided, but rather as an accomplished fact of life for the Jewish people, as for all the Western nations.

All movements, both those that support this reality and those that negate it, accept it, adapt to it, and regard it as irreversible, at least until the arrival of the Messiah who still tarries though His time has come. This applies even to the ultra-Orthodox movements: the more radical these are, the more clearly they reveal their nature as a reaction to the present rather than as a "fossilized" continuation of the past. The more forthcoming they are in their response to the secular present, the more they reveal their own use of the conceptual tools and instruments created by triumphant secularism. In both these senses, the ultra-Orthodox movements are no less "contemporary" than the "progressive" movements that feel threatened by their strength. Thus, both sides not only belong to the same era, but indeed create each other through a process of "challenge" and "response," drawing selectively on the sources of their divergent past which prevents them from communication through a common cultural language, despite their similarities.

A Question of Definitions

We encounter this reality directly in examining the preliminary question that forms the basis for any empathetic discussion between adversaries: how are we to understand the definitions by which the "religious" present themselves in contrast to the "secularists"? In particular, who are the "secularists" and what defines them as

such? The strident tones of the debate might suggest that the meaning of the word "secular" is universally acknowledged. Yet in seeking a definition, it emerges not only that each religious or secular group has its own definition, but that they have great difficulty phrasing this definition in positive terms. It appears that it is only the clearly-defined image of religiosity found among the Orthodox religious (albeit in divergent forms), and the clearly-defined image of the "religious" among the secularists (though this differs from the self-image of the religious) that enable us to reach the banal conclusion that the secular are not religious, and vice versa. Yet what makes the "non-religious" "secular," and what makes the "religious" "not secular"? The question remains.

Another fact that is no less problematic in promoting substantive dialogue is the difficulty in defining the balance of power between religious and secular. Here we find ourselves facing a puzzle. The general sense shared both by those who view themselves as "religious" and those who consider themselves "secular" is that the dominant majority in the State of Israel, and the group that shapes its character, is "secular." This proposition may be confirmed empirically in terms of political strength: the majority of Israeli citizens are represented by parties that are defined as secular. Yet this proposition is challenged not only by the success of the religious parties in securing rather impressive achievements in terms of the influence of religion over the Israeli state and society, but also by statistical research. The reality is that in Israel those who define themselves as secular constitute between 10 and 15 percent of the citizenry. Orthodox Jews of various shades constitute some 20 percent, while the remainder -- an absolute majority -- are "traditional" Jews of various types; Conservative and Reform may reasonably be included in this latter category. Accordingly, it is evident that the majority of those who vote for secular parties view themselves as "religious" or "traditional," and that their approach to religion, as they perceive it, is positive. Who then are the "secular," and how did they come to constitute a dominant majority in shaping the general character of Israel?

The statistical enigma presented above becomes stranger still when we seek to examine the ways in which the secular character of the "secular" parties is manifested, both in ideological terms and, more particularly, in terms of practical policy. Since it is easy to define the manner in which the religious parties are religious, we once again find that the only clear answer to this question is that a party is "secular" if it is not "religious." A more meaningful self-definition is found only in those secular parties whose policies are based on ideological opposition to the imposition of religious norms on the public lifestyle in the State of Israel. Yet here, too, we encounter a paradox, in that these parties, with their prominent "secular" ideology, include a significant number of individuals who view themselves

as representing enlightened religiosity -- particularly adherents of the Reform and Conservative movements, but also a not insignificant number of modern Orthodox who identify with the struggle against "religious coercion." In this context, it is worth noting in passing that even among the ultra-Orthodox there is growing support for the "separation of religion and state."

We are All "Secular"

Who, then, are the secular, and how is their secularism defined? Beyond the political phenomenon outlined above, the answer may be found only in the description of reality with which we opened this discussion. Secularism is no longer an ideology that must be expounded in order to be realized. Secularism is the reality that shapes the cultural, economic, technological, media, social, political, constitutional, scientific, and artistic character of Israel. All the citizens of Israel live within a secular reality and take this reality for granted, whether or not they would have chosen such a situation. Accordingly, the truth is that not only is the majority secular in terms of its attitude toward the state or toward the public as a whole, but that all Israeli citizens as such are *ex posteriori* secular. This explains why so many religious and traditional Israelis vote for the secular parties, since these represent their vital interests in the economic, social, and political spheres. The same would continue to apply even if a majority of Israeli citizens became religious in one variety or another, since their secular interests would not disappear thereby, and they would present these interests according to the same fronts along which secular and religious parties currently face one another.

In many respects and in varying ways, therefore, we are all "secular." The debate, as noted above, relates to the question of whether this fact is positive, negative, or both positive and negative. The reverse side of this same coin is that we all have a "religious problem" of one kind or another. Even those who approve of and identify with secularized reality cannot ignore the problems this reality causes, if only due to the presence of those -- and they emerge as a majority -- who do not share their satisfaction, whose expectations have not been met, and who feel they have suffered greatly in both material and spiritual terms. Can a completely secularized political, social, and cultural reality solve these problems through its scientific, technologic, economic, administrative, or media achievements? Can it resolve the moral and existential problems that follow from these achievements? Can it give people what religion used to -- and still does -- give them?

Secularization: Historical Background

In order to address these questions, we must define more clearly and precisely the parameters of secularized reality. To this end, it is worth examining the historical process that reached its conclusion in this reality. This process lasted several centuries, beginning in the Italian Renaissance and the Reformation of Central Europe, and undergoing several transformations. The process manifested itself in a different form in each of the European nations, and it goes without saying that the character of this process was unique in the case of the Jewish people who lived in exile among these nations. Nevertheless, with hindsight, the following broad directions may be identified:

Firstly, secularization as a phenomenon is unique to Western culture. Its expansion to other cultures is the product of the imperialism of this culture, whether in the form of old-fashioned colonialism or through the modern-day pattern of marketing and media. The origins of secularization lie in the imperialistic history that created Western colonial culture. The underlying base of this culture are the various cultures of a number of pagan peoples, each of which settled its surroundings and developed a distinct material, linguistic, religious, artistic, and political culture. The cultures of the European peoples were united through the force of a conquering power, the Romans, who developed an empire enjoying great military, political, economic, and civilizational strength. In order to unify the "barbarian" peoples under their rule, the Romans imposed their culture as a universal super-culture worthy of world dominion. But in order for this union to be complete and stable even for the lower echelons of society, these peoples had to be united by a universal religion. The pagan religions were pluralistic and particularistic, and were therefore incapable of uniting nations. Accordingly, the Roman empire adopted the Christian religion, which had developed as a universal religion seeking to achieve world dominion under the Greek empire, which preceded and laid the foundations for the Roman empire. In order to avoid a similar fate, the Roman empire imposed the Christian Church on all the peoples under its control.

Thus a double-edged cultural and governmental structure was imposed over the popular pagan cultures of the conquered peoples. It is important to emphasize that while the cultures of the conquered peoples were repressed, they were not eliminated. In each country, Christianity was obliged to adapt itself to the people. Accordingly, it preserved the ancient pagan foundations while developing its own strength, independent of the empire. This led to considerable tension. The combination of an imperial dynasty and an ecumenical Church was intended to strengthen control, but actually created two sources of power that struggled for

supremacy. The Church claimed supremacy over the empire as the supra-terrestrial source of temporal dominion and power, addressing the nature of man as a sinner. The Church represented the "dominion of the heavens" -- the only way through which man might be cleansed of his sins through his faith, winning eternal life and happiness. To receive these rewards, he must accept his allotted portion of suffering in the mundane world, obey mundane authority, and obey the Church -- the only path through which he might be redeemed of the sins of the flesh. The model presented by the Church argued that the individual could not redeem his soul by himself. Only through the grace of God, who sent his son to the world to repent for the sins of humanity through his death, could the individual redeem his body-ridden soul, through his faith in the myth of the savior, and through his participation in the rituals and sacraments of the Church.

In this manner, the Church took authority for the education of all the citizens of the empire, shaping their world views, values, and ways of life. It controlled cultural and spiritual creativity in all spheres -- science, philosophy, and the arts. All fields of creativity were subject to the theological control of the priests. The empire helped the Church impose its authority in return for legitimation of its temporal power. Eventually, however, the Church amassed considerable temporal power of its own, through its assets and through the mechanisms it developed to defend its rights against the secular state.

The Initial Meaning of the Secularization Process

Thus a distinction developed between the secular sphere of life and the spiritual and sacred sphere. The spiritual, sacred, and exalted sphere -- the sphere of truth and eternity -- lay above the physical, sinning, and base sphere, a transient and false sphere that could be redeemed only through divine mercy. This dichotomy is the key to understanding the original significance of the process of secularization. The process has its origins in the friction between the ruling dynasty and the social elites, which represented interest in temporal life and culture, and the Church, which imposed its authority on this interest, lest it undermine faith in its redeeming force. When the structure of the empire began to disintegrate, and as nation-states emerged and sought legitimacy for their control over their peoples, the Church became a superfluous and undesirable force, limiting the exploitation of natural resources and the development of the temporal civilization on which the state based its power.

Moreover, a struggle began not only for the independence of government and the

supporting elites, but also for influence over the people as a whole. From the early stages of the enlightenment movement in the Western nations, one may already note that process which, as mentioned above, would continue into the Renaissance culture and Protestant Christianity, as the revolution of the representatives of temporal strata against the religion that held them back. This process was manifested in a consistent struggle aiming to free one sphere after another within Western civilization from the control of the Church: economics, politics, science, social morality, art, and philosophy. These spheres were now validated as worthy areas of activity through which humans redeem themselves from the suffering of temporal life through their natural forces, through unraveling the laws of nature and through using nature to achieve happiness. Naturally, this rebellion also aimed to reverse the definition of temporal happiness as a chimera. On the contrary, man was seen as a temporal creature, and his spirit also came to be seen as temporal, expressing itself through creativity and realizing the destiny of humanity -- to better the world. These are the basic components of the secular ideologies that advocated modernization.

As we have seen, the secular movements rebelled against the Church. It is worth emphasizing, however, that this rebellion was directed against the powerful religious establishment, and not necessarily against belief in a transcendental God or in eternal spiritual destiny. In the realm of faith, the only aspect that was rejected was the Church's argument that there is a contradiction between the temporal objectives of man and his eternal spiritual and ethereal objectives. To this end, the required step was to eliminate the proposition that temporal life is dominated by the sins of the flesh, and that humans cannot be redeemed from sin by their own spiritual forces. Once this humanistic recognition was achieved, harmony could be created between temporal and ethereal ideals. The biblical literature provided a model for this approach, and was accordingly much favored by the humanistic Renaissance, both in Protestant Christianity and, of course, in the Jewish Enlightenment.

Different Manifestations of Secularization

At later stages of the struggle, atheistic or pagan secular movements appeared, challenging not only the dominion of the Church but also the very belief in a transcendental God and in ethereal ideas. These movements included scientific positivism, Spinozan rationalism, materialist Marxism, and Nietzschean romanticism, which manifested the rebellion of the pagan culture of the Western peoples not only against the Church, but also against the cultural heritage of

Greece and Rome. Despite the dispersion of these approaches through the mass movements that generated World War II, however, the modern religious movements did not disappear.

By "modern religious movements" we refer to various forms of "progressive" religiosity that reconciled themselves to the supremacy of the state in terms of the operation of coercive force, and relinquished any dimension of direct or indirect coercion, assuming that the role of religion is to act through educational means to raise the moral and spiritual level of man. These movements advocated the integration of religion and religious institutions into the fabric of secular social and cultural life, in order to add a dimension of spirituality. The secular liberal state showed considerable interest in this form of modern religiosity as an educational force uniting its citizens above a foundation of social and cultural values. In the Jewish people, three forms of religiosity of this type were to emerge -- Reform, Conservative, and modern Orthodox.

Thus different forms of secularizing processes developed. Some advocated religion as an independent sphere among the cultural spheres, while others rejected this sphere. It is worth emphasizing in this context that the concept of the "separation of religion and state" in countries in which society remained essentially religious was not intended to negate religious influence over social and cultural life. Indeed, the opposite is the case: the aim was to redefine the place of religion in the state, and to grant it full legitimacy as a central constituent in shaping the common cultural identity and values of its citizens. The most prominent example of this approach in modern times is the United States. Advocates of the "separation of religion and state" in Israel make frequent reference to the United States as an exemplary model to be followed, but usually fail to acknowledge that the United States is the most "religious" of all the Western nations -- not only because some 90 percent of its citizens define themselves as religious, but because the state strengthens religion through the ritual use of its symbols, and through encouraging religious moral messages as the foundation for basic solidarity among its citizens.

Secularization, then, is the process by which the various spheres of temporal cultural creativity -- science, philosophy, art, social morality, and political government -- began to be freed from the dictates and dogmas of the Church. The secular ideologies strengthened their demand to realize the goal of liberation, at the same time as they developed new norms and institutions in order to represent and validate the various disciplines, and to determine the place each would enjoy within the constellation that would shape culture as a whole, define the general objectives of temporal civilization, and develop tools for realizing these objectives.

As long as the objective of liberation and overall institutionalization had not been achieved; as long as islands of the traditional establishment remained within the general culture; and as long as an institutional and ideological continuity existed between new and old, there was a place under the sun for secular cultural and political movements that sought to complete secularization and developed a range of secular ideologies (humanistic, liberal, Marxist, social-democratic, and nationalist). If these movements declined to be replaced by "postmodernist" ideologies, this can only mean that they became superfluous: their function was completed.

Secularization after World War II

During World War II, the continuity between the old and new institutions of culture was completely destroyed. A distinct civilizatory infrastructure developed with astonishing speed on the ruins of the war; this infrastructure starkly lacked any element of continuity, reflecting instead revolutionary achievements in the present. The difference was manifested in all the main spheres: political and social administration, productive technology and the organization of consumption, and the media. What occurred in science and technology was not merely a great leap forward, but rather a close series of leaps. The evolutionary perspective of "modern" civilization, which maintains a historical continuity with the past, was replaced by a revolutionary perspective that cuts itself off from any aspect of the past, and constantly looks to the next present. The results are evident. The civilizatory infrastructure considered "modern" before the war has disappeared from the contemporary landscape -- its remnants may be recognized only in museums. Needless to say, nothing has remained of the traditional infrastructure that still formed part of the landscape of modern life prior to World War II. In other words, the new, different civilization is absolute and powerfully effective; accordingly, it appears irreversible even to those "fundamentalist" religious elements who tend to view it as the work of the devil. Indeed, they reach a pact with this reality and use its tools to survive.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that the fact that religion has not disappeared during the course of these revolutions does not diminish the reality that the process of secularization has achieved its objectives and has been completed. Indeed, the fact that religion has once again become a challenge requiring renewed attention, and a focus for passionate debates and struggles within religion and against it, actually results from and confirms the completion of secularization. As mentioned above, secularization was from the outset directed not against religious faith, but

against the coercion of faith as an element of government seeking to define culture as a whole. If it emerges that religion has also been successful in integrating as an independent sphere within a completely secularized culture, this may be viewed as an additional and important component in completing the process of secularization. However, a further development has become clear. Not only has the need for religion not disappeared, and the completed process of secularization not led to the emergence of an alternative that takes the place of religion, but in fact the process has intensified the need for religion, both due to the moral, social, spiritual, and existentialist problems raised by secularism, which it failed to resolve, and due to the profound human need for a connection with sources, for continuity and permanence -- something which, in the postmodernist age, can be provided only by religion, rooted in its sources and faithful to its eternal hidden truth. Secularized civilization and modern global culture are incapable of meeting these mental needs, and of answering the ultimate questions regarding the meaning of life as addressed by religion. One might say this weakness is despite the tremendous material wealth secularized civilization has brought to the world, and despite the unprecedented control humans have gained over nature and over themselves -- but one might equally suggest that it is because of these features.

Secularization and the Israeli Reality

As noted, the Jewish people underwent the process of secularization along with the other Western cultures. Due to its unique position as a people in exile, and due to the tension between Judaism and Christianity, the forms and movements of Jewish secularization were unique. Moreover, the culture this process shaped in the Land of Israel differs from that in the diaspora. Yet these unique aspects go beyond the purview of the present discussion. In terms of defining the problems as these are raised for discussion in Israeli reality, we need do no more than reiterate the point made at the beginning of this article. The *Kulturkampf* that is conventionally described as being waged between "religious" and "secular" is actually a war between different types of secular Jews, each of whom is coping in their own way with the problems resulting from secularization and with the role of religion in solving these problems.

Accordingly, the time has come to internalize this fact and revise the definition of the problems on our political, social, and cultural agendas, as well as the tools used for coping with these problems. The time has come for the representatives of religious movements in Israel which have accepted secular reality as an accomplished fact, and succeeded in penetrating this reality, to abandon their

strategy of defense through denial of the facts. They should acknowledge the facts, initially to themselves, and begin to address the consequences directly. Equally, the time has come for their opponents to admit that they are no longer the sole proprietors of secularism. The time has certainly come for both sides to take the logical step that follows from the internalization of the fact that the postmodernist agenda is also "post-secular." They should define their current spiritual and moral dilemmas substantively on the basis of this awareness, identify the origin of these problems against this foundation, and strive to develop solutions that may be implemented in the present reality, aware that their opponents will not be disappearing from the scene in the foreseeable future. If they adopt this course, we shall be presented with world views that differ from one another on the basis of an agreed acceptance of reality, while using a common cultural language. This will certainly not mean an end to tension and disagreement, but a substantive debate will emerge among individuals capable of listening to one another, and occasionally even convincing each other sufficiently to achieve the compromises that will enable creative life together.

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