Religious-Secular Reality of Individual Consciousness In The Context of COVID-19

Leonid MOZGHOVYI¹,
Volodymyr MULIAR²,
Olena STEPANOVA³,
Vitaliy IGNATYEV⁴,
Viacheslav STEPANOV⁵

¹ SHEI "Donbas State Pedagogical
University", Sloviansk, Ukraine,
mozgh@ukr.net

² Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University,
Zhytomyr, Ukraine, yim5454@ukr.net

³ Department of Tourism documentary and
intercultural communication Open
International University of human
development «Ukraine», Ukraine,
elen_ddd@ukr.net

⁴ Donetsk National Medical University,
Ukraine, va.ignatyev@ukr.net

⁵ SHEI "Donbas State Pedagogical
University", Sloviansk, Ukraine,
stepanovviaa@ukr.net

Abstract: The question of the secularity of society still remains open, since scientists have proposed only cautious speculative answers, while every scientist understands that in the social sciences it is a sad experience of predictions, that history is random and therefore unpredictable and the future always remains fundamentally open.

The process of transformation of postmodern society, the development of which is actively influenced by the current pandemy of COVID-19, entailed the revival of religious values and the formation of a qualitatively new religious consciousness. In connection with the rise in the social status of religious consciousness and the widespread dissemination of religious ideas, primarily at the everyday level, the analysis of individual religious consciousness as one of the ways to comprehend the world is of particular importance. The social nature of religious consciousness is manifested not only in the fact that religious values are perceived as a kind of khanism of social regulation, but also in the fact that they serve as epistemological guidelines and often compete with scientific values. This determines the growing philosophical interest in the analysis of the epistemological functions of religion and secular reality, as well as the cognitive capabilities of religious consciousness, which is impossible without a consistent study of the methodological basis of religious knowledge.

Keywords: *secularity, COVID-19 pandemy, religious-secular reality, individual consciousness, self-understanding.*

How to cite: Mozghovyi, L., Muliar, V., Stepanova, O., Ignatyev, V., & Stepanov, V. (2021). Religious-Secular Reality of Individual Consciousness In The Context of COVID-19. *Postmodern Openings*, 12(2), 522-534.
<https://doi.org/10.18662/po/12.2/322>

1. Introduction

The question of the secularity of society still remains open, since scientists have proposed only cautious speculative answers, while every scientist understands that in the social sciences it is a sad experience of predictions, that history is random and therefore unpredictable and the future always remains fundamentally open.

In considering the phenomenon of secularization, it can be noted that most non-Western societies are becoming more and more secular: the cosmic order is increasingly determined by contemporary science and technology, the social order is increasingly determined by the interconnection of "democratic" states based on the principle of citizenship, and the market economy and the media public spheres are all more often appeal to human dignity, freedom, equality and the pursuit of happiness. So, in general, the world is simultaneously becoming more "religious", more "secular" as the Western Christian binary system of classification of religious-secular reality globalizes.

The process of secularization in many European societies has reached a point of no return. Religion as a "chain of memory" is lost without the possibility of restoration, and entire generations of young Europeans grow up having no personal relationship to the Christian religious tradition or even knowing about it. Not only Christian churches, but entire families have lost their role in the process of religious socialization. Unless there is some kind of unexpected religious revival, the process of European secularization cannot be reversed (Svensson et al., 2020).

At the same time, neither naive secularism nor secularist self-understanding can be considered healthy, that is, they can no longer be taken for granted, without questioning or subjecting them to serious reflection.

2. The essence and main characteristics of post-secular and postmodern society in conditions of COVID-19

The fact that we are wondering whether we are entering an era of a global post-secular and postmodern society shows that we have crossed the threshold that we can no longer simply remain secularists without any reflection.

Habermas emphasizes the need to read the "signs of the times", argues for the willingness to rethink their own secularism and take a post-secular position. The first and most obvious reason for this is globalization. In our century, it is becoming increasingly clear that European secularization

is not a universal norm in other parts of the world; that in another world, as it is modernized, people do not become more secular, but become more religious, or become both more secular and more religious at the same time, which, of course, destroys the binary scheme.

The global media constantly claim not only the preservation of the role of religion, but also the unexpected survival of world religions in the context of globalization. But the process of globalization itself requires religious responses. The old world religions give such answers in many different ways. Globalization not only creates new challenges in relation to the old world religions, but also opens new opportunities for them (Stark & Bainbridge, 1986).

When it comes to religions and their opposite - secularism, we can not talk about any global rule. It must be acknowledged that many categories that have emerged in the process of Christian-secular European development hinder the understanding of another world - instead of promoting understanding, these categories lead to a fundamental misunderstanding. Thus, we need first of all to "desecularize" our consciousness and secularist and postmodern categories in order to create the possibility of developing more adequate concepts through which to understand the novelty and postmodernity that occur before our eyes.

The second reason for rethinking secularism is the lack of a single European rule of secularization. Such a rule is the product of a secularist understanding of European modernization.

None of the national models - neither French or German, nor Dutch or Italian, nor Danish or British, can serve as such a general European rule (Finke, 1997). Historical reality bears witness to the multiple and complex elements of secularization and religious revival in Europe, many of which are associated with colonial experiences outside Europe.

Due to the interconnected processes of European communities, religious individualization and, more importantly, increasing immigration, are becoming religiously pluralistic. The difficulties faced by all European societies in integrating immigrants can be seen as evidence of how difficult it is to reconcile the European model of the nation-state with the task of regulating real religious pluralism (Casanova, 2007). In doing so, one should avoid false dichotomies embedded in binary categories - religious and secular, traditional and contemporary. But first of all, one should be more critical of the stage-by-stage consciousness, which determines the secular self-interpretation of postmodernity. It is worth noting that in this case, becoming post-secular does not necessarily mean becoming religious again.

Now, when there is a global expansion of scientism and technocratism, it is important to support the post-metaphysical form of philosophical thinking that Habermas so defends.

The theory of the linguification of the sacred and the theory of the public sphere for Jurgen Habermas are based on the notion of the dominant process of secularization. On the one hand, it is significantly associated with the process of Western postmodernization, and on the other, it is understood as a later progressive stage within the framework of the general stadial and evolutionary process of human development. For this reason, the "secular" and "contemporary" in the theory of the scientist have always been internally connected (Habermas et al., 2010).

The use of the word "secular" is very similar to the contemporary understanding of the secular political sphere - a constitutional democratic state and a democratic public space, which are neutral in relation to all worldviews, religious and non-religious.

Over time, when the western medieval Christian world was finally formed, and the Christian Church achieved complete triumph, the secular became one of the terms of the dyad, in which two worlds are divided: the religious and the secular world (Markus, 2006). The wording "to subject to secularization" means, first of all, "to make it worldly," that is, to transfer a religious individual or thing into a secular state. This concerns the internal Christian secularization, the purpose of which was to spiritualize the temporary, to transfer the "religious" striving for perfection from the monasteries to the secular world.

In a broad sense, the term "secular" can mean that we are all secular, all contemporary societies are secular and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Post-secular can mean resacralization and renewal of contemporary societies within the sacred immanent space.

The meaning of the term "secular" in a narrower sense: self-sufficient and exclusive secularism, when people are simply "irreligious", that is, devoid of religion and closed in any form of transcendence outside the secular limit. In this case, the secular ceases to be part of the dyad and is constituted as a closed reality. In many ways, this is one of the possible end results of the secularization process as an attempt to overcome the dualism of the religious and the secular through liberation from the religious component.

The association of the term "secularization" with the decline of religious beliefs and practices is relatively recent. This is evidenced by the absence of this term in the dictionaries of most European languages. At the

same time, the decline in religious beliefs and practices is a consequence of modernization processes.

The historical understanding of secularism acts as an affirmation of the superiority in the present of the contemporary secular worldview in relation to other, probably earlier and therefore more primitive religious forms of understanding. To be secular is to be contemporary, and therefore, as a consequence, to be religious is to be, in a sense, still not quite contemporary.

3. The essence of secularism

The essence of secularism as a philosophy, history, ideology is that the Western Christian historical process of secularization is viewed as a universal teleological process of human development from faith to despondency, from a primitive irrational or metaphysical religion in contemporary, rational, secular consciousness.

So, secularism happens (Sorensen et al., 2011):

- simple secularism, if being religious is a normal state;
- self-sufficient and exclusive secularism, when life without religion is thought of as a normal and understandable state;
- secular secularism, when liberation from "religion" acts as a presumed condition for human prosperity.

One of the definitions of secularization defines "religion" as an elementary stage in human and social development. It is in this context that Habermas, Reder, Schmidt, Brieskorn, Ricken, (2010) use the term "post-secular" - that is, as a change in society itself and in consciousness. From here we derive three forms of secularization, detailed in the following:

1) Secularization as the evolution of secular spheres (state, economics, science) in the understanding of religion, is characterized as separation from church institutions and religious norms. That is, the religious and the secular are complementary aspects.

2) Secularization as a method of eliminating the religious needs of people in postmodern society.

3) Secularization as a monopolization of the individual understanding of religion, is also defined as a general contemporary marker of the historical era.

Since all three forms of secularization can be traced in European countries, namely secular differentiation, religious decline and individualization of religion, they are interrelated.

American sociologists of religion render the term "secularization" of a narrower content - as a deactualization of a person's religious life.

However, they find no conclusive evidence of the rapid decline in religious beliefs and practices in American society.

The new American paradigm has changed the view of the European model of secularization. Because what was previously perceived as an American exception is acquiring normative status. This is due to the low level of religiosity in Europe or clearly regulated monopoly or religious "markets of consciousness". However, statistical information about the religious situation in Europe does not confirm the main provisions of the American theory (Berger et al., 2008).

The existing European theory of secularization clearly proves how the American paradigm can explain the religious characteristics of the United States, but cannot be adapted to the heterogeneous situation in Europe.

Yes, both the Czech Republic and France are the best examples of secularizing European societies. This suggests that there are significant differences in secularization patterns in Europe - not only between the countries of Eastern and Western Europe, but also between other countries of the world.

Significant decline in church attendance in Europe since the 1950s. It is an important example for confirming the traditional theory of secularization. In most European countries, less than 20% of people are regular visitors to the church, and in East Germany, Russia and the Scandinavian countries, the number of such believers is only 10% (Caplow, 1985). If these indicators are comparable with the results in the United States, we can conclude that in Europe, secularization has basically taken the form of "rozchurchneniya", that is, liberation from territorial confessional religiosity.

In general, European secularization can be characterized as a process of gradual deconfessionalization of the state. It is this criterion that determines the historical uniqueness of European secularization.

In fact, the European pattern of secularization cannot be reproduced in other contexts, for which the previous historical pattern of confessionalization of states, nations and peoples is not characteristic, requires their secularization, that is, deconfessionalization.

Unlike most Europeans, Americans did not have to go through a process of deconfessionalization in any national ecclesiastical institution, since even the state colonial churches - Congregational, Presbyterian, and Anglican - remained small organizations, while the majority of the population was churched. The American state was formed as a contemporary secular state, not subject to the process of any

deconfessionalization, and the dual constitutional formula for prohibiting the establishment of a state religion and the principle of religious freedom in society guaranteed the development of denominationalism as a system of free and open religious pluralism in society.

American denominationalism is a system of mutual recognition of voluntary religious institutions and associations within civil society, without state regulation, except through the courts, where, from a legal point of view, conflicts within religious organizations or between them are considered (Casanova, 2003).

A. Tocqueville made a sociological study of the postmodern system of American religious pluralism and its similarity with the model of a pluralistic and democratic civil society.

Tocqueville puts forward a sufficiently convincing institutional theory to explain the unique vitality of the particular American system of religious denominationalism than contemporary theories of American religious markets. The latter are based on: 1) the unconfirmed anthropological assumption of a single type of human rationality; 2) the anti-historical theory of religious markets, according to which the demand for religious services is general and constant; 3) the anti-historical theory of a self-regulating religious market (Casanova, 2010).

Therefore, the difference in models of religious denominationalism in pluralistic civil society and confessional national churches with limited pluralism has important consequences for the structure of civil society on both sides of the Atlantic, but also for the development of inclusive, more egalitarian and solidarity social states in Europe.

However, the secularist interpretation of the link between America's lack of welfare and the endurance of religion reverses this relationship. It is not that, as Norris and Inglehart believe, Americans are still very religious, that their existential insecurity is due to the lack of a welfare state; most likely, the Americans still reject any attempt to establish a welfare state precisely because of that model of a self-organized and privately regulated civil society, closely related to their model of religious denominationalism (Warner, 1993).

Norris and Inglehart contributed to the discussion of the two conflicting paradigms of secularization by introducing regional data they collected in the World Value Survey that would validate the classical theory of secularization, clearly showing a clear correlation between the level of social economic development and level of secularization.

Empirically, all indications of a positive correlation between modernization and secularization are given by Western Christian (that is,

post-Christian) societies, primarily Western European countries, as well as Canada, Australia and New Zealand (that is, former colonies inhabited by Europeans). Japan is the only non-Western country that supports Inglehart's thesis in some way.

Inglehart's theory of religion is built on the positivist genealogy of 19th century "primitive" religion, as if there were no more developed sociological theories. For Inglehart, "religion" as a socio-psychological phenomenon is a special reaction to the conditions of existential insecurity. With the growth of existential stability, which increases with economic development, religion loses its functionality and its *raison d'être*. Thus, in post-industrial societies, religion is associated with the economy of scarcity and with material existential uncertainty, replaced by more qualitative forms of post-materialistic spiritual values (Antonenko et al., 2020).

In the global Inglehart table, built in two directions - vertical (traditional / secular-rational) and horizontal (survival / self-expression) - China and the United States emerge as two big outsiders, which casts doubt on the whole theory, albeit from opposite sides. If one accepts the basic assumption that "people who experience its tropical risks during their growing up years (posing a threat to them and their families) or socio-tropical risks (which pose a threat to their community) tend to be more religious than those who exist in more stable, comfortable and presumed circumstances, and given the catastrophic experience of material existential insecurity among wide sections of Chinese society in the 20th century, one would expect a high level of religiosity among the Chinese, especially the older generation. However, the statistics suggest that China (along with Japan - perhaps for similar reasons) is one of the most secular societies on the planet (Berger, 1999).

Comparing the information regarding China, which can be both "secular" and economically undeveloped, so does American society become more religious as it develops economically, casts doubt on the essential correlation between modernization and secularization. American religion is not what is left of the premodern traditional society, but is the result of American postmodernity (Casanova, 1994). Therefore, the expectation that religiosity will decline as Americans' material conditions become more stable are extremely problematic. None of Norris and Inglehart's three explanations for American exceptionalism are convincing enough.

It is wrong to attribute a high degree of religiosity in America to economic instability associated with high levels of economic inequality, when all sectors of American society - from the most privileged to the least

privileged - exhibit very high levels of religiosity, compared to most Western European societies.

As for the argument that Americans can be extremely religious through the constant flow of immigrants from underdeveloped countries, this is also difficult to confirm empirically for several reasons. There is no evidence of a decline in American religiosity between the late 1920s and 1965, when immigrants, for various reasons, were denied access to America, and at the same time this was a period when the institutionalization of the welfare state was limited. There is no evidence of an increase in American religiosity after 1965, when the doors were opened wide again to immigrants. In addition, the assumption that immigrants may be more religious, since they come from undeveloped countries, is also problematic, since half of the immigrants who arrived after 1965 had a higher level of education and income, more than the average American (Bruce, 2000). Moreover, there is undeniable historical evidence that representatives of all waves of immigration to America - during the 19th century and also at the end of the 20th century - became more, not less, religious after they settled in a new country. Most immigrant groups - Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists - today, as in the past, claim that they have become more consciously and reflectively religious in the United States than they were in exile in their countries.

Secularization as the differentiation of the secular spheres from religion, is usually understood as the emancipation of the secular from church institutions and religious norms and the accompanying differentiation and specialization of religion within the newly created religious sphere. As the events of the intellectual life of the world in the first decade of the 21st century have shown, there is a huge constant interest of researchers and philosophers of all directions and branches of scientific activity in the problem of the role of religion in the postmodern world and the prospects for its further existence and development.

4. The main hypotheses on the “future of religion” and “the religion of the future” in the postmodern society in the conditions of COVID-19

Secularization as the decline of religious beliefs and practices in contemporary societies is often perceived as a universal process of human development. All three processes of secularization - secular differentiation, religious decline and individualization of religion - appear to be historically interconnected, they are perceived as three dimensions of the same general process of secularization.

Over the past centuries, several classical philosophical, sociological, and cultural hypotheses of the “future of religion” and “the religion of the future” have emerged (Stark & Iannaccone, 1994). The most significant of them:

O. Comte’s version and D. Dennett’s suprascientious pragmatism is a scientist - According to this version, with the development of civilization, the sacred is inevitably superseded by the scientific, indicating the possibility of the emergence of a positivist religion, in which the future is sacred, as a state of attainability, for which a person exists.

Evolutionary transformational version of E. Durkheim (2008, pp. 89-100) - The scientist believed that the sacred and the religious tradition organized around it is an enduring process, essential for a person as a social being, accustomed to "symbolize" and carry out activities in the procedure of reflective withdrawal. In this case, religion acts as a specific way of symbolizing social forces and social relations, as "sails" over the personal worlds of individuals, as a system of ideas and ideals through which individuals represent and become aware of the social world of which they are members (Norris & Inglehart, 2004).

An exclusive numinous-neutralistic version of Otto (1923) and the main representatives of the Western phenomenology of religion of the 20th century - In this version, the fundamental position of the authors is the conviction that, choosing the sacred in the numinous mode, a neutral idea of the religious is introduced, free from the shades of not only theistic personalism, but also generally conservative theism. This aspect covers all the variety of possible encounters between a person and the world of religion (Hennessey, 2020).

Exclusiveism as the Idea of "Eternal Religion" - According to this point, society needs to assess the prospects of religion in the postmodern world, it accumulates the constitutionally theoretical meanings of ecumenism (Casanova, 2010).

Exclusion of the sacred in religious traditions by Daisaku Ikeda - For Ikeda (2018, pp. 177-189), Buddhism is a "living philosophy" that seeks to achieve a rational understanding of life in the light of scientific knowledge. Since, unlike other world religions, Buddhism is not interested in the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, but in the problems of life and death, their circulation and the search for consciousness - only such a religion is a philosophy, open to any personal world and open to the deep existential needs of a person of any kind. civilization.

Plurality and universality of the sacred for Eliade (1996, pp. 34-45) - The scientist believes that a completely rational person is an abstraction, most "unbelievers" people live under the influence of pseudo-religions and deformed meanings. A religious decision, unlike a scientific or philosophical one, is not only able to solve any spiritual crisis - it makes existence "open" to special values, enduring and common, allows a person to rise above personal life problems and ultimately enter the spiritual world.

Plurality And Adaptationism Of The "Sacred - Secular" In The Version Of Habermas, Reder, Schmidt, Brieskorn, Ricken (2010) - They argues that the term "post-secular" does more than pay tribute to religious communities for the functional contribution they make to recreating desired motives and attitudes. The public consciousness of the post-secular society also reflects a normative understanding, which is important for the political interaction of non-believers with believers. In the post-secular society, there is recognition of the fact that the modernization of public consciousness encompasses both religious and secular mentality during the transition to a new phase and reflexively modifies them.

5. Conclusions

So, the postmodern world in conditions of COVID-19 appears within the framework of a binary reality, since the religious-secular consciousness does not tear the world in half, but interacts and develops in the direction under consideration. The problem of individual consciousness in the post-secular world in scientific knowledge is not completed, but there are prerequisites for further reflection for its solution: the variety of experience in discussions about the "future of religion" contributed to the fact that this problem has turned into a testing ground for methodologies and experiments. To put this problem as "public" to a certain extent, it must again become a problem of methodologically verified philosophical reflection within the framework of the "philosophy of the future".

Acknowledgement

The contribution of the authors to the article is as follows: documentation - Leonid, Mozghovyi, Volodymyr, Muliar, Olena, Stepanova, Vitaliy, Ignatyev, Viacheslav, Stepanov, data gathering - Leonid, Mozghovyi, Volodymyr, Muliar, Olena, Stepanova, data processing - Leonid, Mozghovyi, Vitaliy, Ignatyev, Viacheslav, Stepanov, writing - Leonid, Mozghovyi, Volodymyr, Muliar.

References

- Antonenko, T., Kachmar, O., Tsybulko, O., Grachova, T., & Konovalova, M. (2020). Scientific Approaches to Postmodern Spirituality: Theoretical and Methodological Aspects. *Postmodern Openings*, 11(2 Supl 1), 200-214. <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/11.2Sup1/187>
- Berger, P. (ed.), (1999). *The Desecularization of the World*. Ethics and Public Policy Center.
- Berger, P., Davie, G., & Fokas, E. (eds.), (2008). *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations*. Ashgate.
- Bruce, S. (2000). The Supply-Side Model of Religion: The Nordic and Baltic States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39(1), 32-46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0021-8294.00003>
- Caplow, T. H. (1985). Contrasting Trends in European and American Religion. *Sociological Analysis*, 46(2), 101-108. <https://doi.org/0.2307/3711054>
- Casanova, J. (1994). *Public Religions in the Modern World*. University of Chicago Press.
- Casanova, J. (2003). Beyond European and American Exceptionalism: Towards a Global Comparative Perspective. In G. Davie, P. Heelas, & L. Woodehead (eds.), *Predicting Religion* (pp. 45-67). Ashgate.
- Casanova, J. (2007). Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A EU/US Comparison. In T. Banchoff (ed.), *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (pp. 59-84). Oxford University Press.
- Casanova, J. (2010). A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight. In M. Warner, J. Van Antwerpen, & C. Calhoun (eds), *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (pp. 55-63). Harvard University Press.
- Durkheim, E. (2008). *The elementary forms of religious life* (C. Cosman, Trans.). Oxford University Press.
- Eliade, M. (1996). *Patterns in comparative religion*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Finke, R. (1997). The Consequences of Religious Competition: Supply-side Explanation for Religion Change. In L. A. Young (ed.), *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment* (81-90). Routledge.
- Habermas, J., Reeder, M., Schmidt, J., Brieskorn, N., & Ricken, F. (2010). *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*. Polity.
- Hennessey, A. (2020). Social Ontology and the Rituals of Birth. *Proceedings*, 47, 66. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings47010066>
- Ikeda, D. (2018). *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. I (2nd edition). Moscow University Press.
- Markus, R. (2006). *Christianity and the Secular*. University of Notre Dame Press.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2004). *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.

- Otto, R. (1923). The Idea of the Holy. Text of First English Edition. 117-123.
- Sorensen, T., Danbolt, L. J., Lien, L., Koenig, H. G., & Holmen, J. (2011). The relationship between religious attendance and blood pressure: The HUNT Study, Norway. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 42(1), 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.2190/PM.42.1.b>
- Stark, R., & Bainbridge, W. S. (1986). *The Future of Religion*. University of California Press.
- Stark, R., & Iannaccone, L. (1994). A Supply-side Interpretation of the «Secularization» of Europe. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33(3), 230-252. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386688>
- Svensson, N., Hvidt, N., & Nissen, S., Storsveen, M. M., Hvidt, E. A., Søndergaard, J., & Thilsing, T. (2020). Religiosity and Health-Related Risk Behaviours in a Secular Culture—Is there a Correlation? *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59, 2381–2396. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00919-2>
- Warner, R. S. (1993). Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States, *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(5), 1044-1093. <https://doi.org/10.1086/230139>