

# ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE POSTSECULAR PARADIGM

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Ideas of the postsecularism were initially conceived and discussed in the contexts of politics and ideology. The return of religion to the active role on the scene of world politics: this is the phenomenon that has been noticed in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., has manifested itself dramatically in the event of the 11 September 2001 and then served as a base on which the postsecularist conceptions developed. This development made it evident gradually that the phenomenon in question is not isolated, but is connected with many other phenomena and trends of modernity so that all the set of them shows the transition to a certain new state or stage of the global community: the *postsecular stage*. The changes brought forth by this new stage are not restricted to the spheres of politics and ideology and the level of social reality, they involve, in principle, all the basic dimensions of society and human person. Now the specific new features of the postsecular stage are collected in the concept of the *postsecular paradigm*; and it is agreed that the essence of this paradigm is a new type of relationship which is to be established between religious consciousness and secular (irreligious) consciousness. At the previous *stage of the secularization*, secular consciousness tried by all means to drive religion out of the public sphere (after the long preceding period of the domination of religion), and the two formations of consciousness were mainly in conflict and confrontation. The return of religion demonstrated the failure or at least inefficiency of the strategy of secularization, and the postsecular paradigm was (and still is) formed up as an alternative to this strategy. Its basic principle is as follows: both conflicting sides, secular consciousness and religious consciousness, must stop their confrontation and go over to dialogue and partnership.

Of course, the attempts to take an unprejudiced view of the positions and motivations of the opposite side overcoming the confrontation have long history. Most systematically such attempts were undertaken by Protestant consciousness. Being the most rationalistic of the Christian confessions, Protestantism traditionally included currents and trends which demonstrated favorable attitude to secularization and were ready to adapt their own positions to its rules. The school of historical (hyper)criticism in Scriptural studies in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. was the first of many schools and theories that elaborated actively the secularist revision of Christianity. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> c. this line begins to produce radical theories such as those of "religionless Christianity" (D. Bonhoeffer), "theology of the death of God" and so on. In a sense, these theories were more secularist than secular consciousness itself: they accepted not only the trends forcing religion out of the public sphere, but even the prospect of the complete disappearance of religion. It was supposed only that some fragments of Christianity and theology will be kept after obtaining a new radically secularized interpretation, as parts of completely secular worldview. For example, Harvey Cox, one of the followers of Bonhoeffer's theology, in his highly popular book "The Secular City" (1965) writes like this: "The Gospel does not call upon man to turn back to religiosity. The Gospel is a call to creative and mature secular life"<sup>1</sup>. The further development of this line leads to postmodernist theology that rejects all the foundations of Christianity (Trinity, Godmanhood of Christ etc.) and propounds conceptions like "theological materialism" stating that "Salvation does not consist of our climbing out of the physical world, rather it consists of redeeming the physical world"<sup>2</sup>. The connection with religion is here restricted to the use of a few terms like salvation and redemption, and even these terms are given a new completely religionless meaning.

What we see here is a strategy directly opposite to the confrontation with secularism and secular consciousness. On the other hand, it is not a dialogue as well. Rather it is an unconditional surrender of religious consciousness that takes for granted that "the époque of

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<sup>1</sup> H. Cox. The secular city: secularization and urbanization in theological perspective. Moscow, 1995. P.95. (My back-translation of the Russian translation.)

<sup>2</sup> T. Peters. The soul of trans-humanism // Dialog: A journal of theology. 2005. V.44(4). P.388.

religion is gone" (the principal thesis of Bonhoeffer's theology). Here religious consciousness endeavors to justify secularization in all its principles and standings, and transform itself into secular consciousness throughout except perhaps some religious rudiments on the verbal level. It does not envisage for itself any independent role in modernity. In particular, it does not lay claim to possess any irreducible values or contents necessary for human society and person, and it does not propound any constructive criticism or corrections to the scenario of secularization.

Now, let us look at this strategy in the present-day perspective. The end of the "époque of religion" considered as a *fait accompli* or at least as unavoidable in the near future has not come and is not expected to come at all; instead of it, the return of religion takes place. Thus the strategy of voluntary capitulation of religious consciousness is not justified, and, as said above, the strategy of confrontation of religious and secular consciousness is not justified as well. These two strategies can be seen as two extremes forming a binary opposition the both poles of which are not adequate solutions for the present situation. Hence the adequate strategy is something intermediate between the extremes, and the way to it is the deconstruction of the binary opposition. Coming back to the postsecular paradigm, we can consider it as one of possible modes of such deconstruction based on the principle of dialogical partnership. The search for an intermediate strategy of the dialogical kind has also its prehistory. It is not my task to describe it, but I would like to recall just one episode important both for the history of the postsecular paradigm and Russian cultural history.

The episode in question is one of the key events of the Russian Silver Age: the famous Religious-Philosophical Meetings in St.-Petersburg in 1901-1903. Their goal was to bring into contact and launch a thorough dialogue between Russian intelligentsia and Russian Church, the two forces that embodied, respectively, secular and religious consciousness. The participants characterized the contemporary Russian situation as corresponding to the process of secularization at the stage when the opposing sides begin to see their confrontation as fruitless and harmful. In the opening speech of one of the initiators of the Meetings, Valentine Ternavtsev, this situation has been described as follows: "Intelligentsia and Church are the two opposite leading forces ... Intelligentsia is alien to Church and cannot find in it any place for herself ... There is an abyss between intelligentsia and Church"<sup>3</sup>. However, intelligentsia was not sure anymore that her ideals, views and strategies were absolutely right: "The final ends of civilization and enlightenment for which the struggle was fought are shaken in the consciousness of intelligentsia"<sup>4</sup>. And, taking into account that the Church is an irreplaceable factor in Russian life and Russian people's minds (cf.: "Russian Church is people's Church. It did not leave the Russian people in all its humiliations"<sup>5</sup>), the members of intelligentsia who initiated the meetings propounded a new strategy: "the search for the ways to conciliation". For them, the conciliation meant that both conflicting sides should change profoundly; they should find common values and collaborate in reaching great goals of society and mankind. The Church, they thought, has lapsed into the "estrangement from vital interests of society" and "is facing great task" which is to accomplish the "social calling of Christianity" by means of advancing to "social salvation in Christ"; they saw the duty of the Church in the resolute turn to active social work and the support of the struggle for social justice and improvement of society. As for the Church side, its spokesmen were often not ready to accept the criticism and admit the necessity of essential changes; the advocates of changes and reforms in the clerical milieu became active and numerous a bit later, after the October Manifesto of 1905. But still the Chairman of the Meetings, the bishop Sergius (Stragorodsky, the future Patriarch) agreed that the common goal was the rapprochement and conciliation of the sides and stressed the benefits of the dialogue: "We all who assembled here learn to understand each other and understand what separates us, and we shall be able to remove many apparent barriers that are erected by our mutual incomprehension"<sup>6</sup>. – Evidently, these St.-Petersburg Meetings had many postsecular features and voiced many postsecular ideas. Postsecular features can also

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<sup>3</sup> V. Ternavtsev. Russian Church in the face of a great task // Zapiski Peterburgskikh Religiozno-Filosofskikh Sobranii. St.-Petersburg, 1906. P.9, 10. (In Russian.)

<sup>4</sup> Ib. P.19.

<sup>5</sup> Ib. P.11.

<sup>6</sup> Ib. P.247-248.

be seen in all the phenomenon of Russian Religious-Philosophical Renaissance, the mainstream of which has been shaped by thinkers who moved, by Fr. Sergius Bulgakov's formula, "from Marxism to idealism, and from idealism to Orthodox Christianity" and, becoming Church figures (like Florensky, Bulgakov e.a.), changed the atmosphere of the Church life and helped to make it open to the secular culture. Largely speaking, one can see in culture of the Silver Age a *sui generis* prologue to the present-day postsecularism. The dialogue of religious and secular consciousness was then focusing on social and cultural problems.

One century later, the dialogue is renewed in a drastically changed world. What are now its principal dimensions and key points? As we stressed, the immediate factors that pushed one to the renewal of the dialogue were very concrete circumstances and events in the political sphere. Soon it was understood, however, that these circumstances and events make it necessary the transition of the global community to a new postsecular stage, at which religious and secular consciousness should build up a relationship of a new type based on dialogical partnership. The study of the principles of this partnership called usually now the postsecular paradigm (PSP) has actively begun, and the first substantial contributions to the PSP have been presented by Jürgen Habermas and Josef Ratzinger who became soon the Pope Benedict 16. In the last decade they both have several times turned to the problem of revising the relation of religious and secular consciousness. Being recognized leaders and spokesmen of these two formations of consciousness in the West, they were taking into account the position of each other, and their personal meeting and discussion in Munich on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2004 was a convincing demonstration of the dialogical partnership and thus a kind of symbol of the PSP *in actu*. As a spokesman for secular consciousness, Habermas formulates the main condition that the religious consciousness should meet: "All that is required here is the epistemic ability to consider one's faith reflexively from the outside and to relate it to secular views"<sup>7</sup>. From the opposite side, Ratzinger formulates what religious consciousness expects from secular consciousness for the success of the dialogue. In the Encyclica "Fides et Ratio" (2005) and the Regensburg speech "Faith, Reason and University" (2006) he propounds the concept of the "reason of faith". Secular consciousness should develop self-criticism and recognize the reason of faith as a sound and full-blooded formation of human reason. To achieve this, it should overcome the positivist conception of reason as too narrow, and elaborate some "post-positivist" paradigm of reason and cognition that will share with the reason of faith the basic principle of the "obedience to the truth".

Taken together, the Habermas and Ratzinger positions outline a certain form of the PSP that outgrows the borders of the political and ideological sphere and goes deeper. Here the dialogue of religious and secular consciousness develops on the cognitive and epistemological level. No doubt, such character of it is closely connected with the fact that religious consciousness was here represented by a prominent Catholic theologian, and epistemological problems of religion such as the problem of faith and reason were always central for Catholic thought. However, Eastern-Christian thought has different priorities. For Orthodox consciousness, the main element of religion and religious life is living and authentic spiritual experience, and more concretely, the ascetic, sacramental and eschatological experience of communion with Christ, and lived experience of any human person is considered to be his/her principal and constitutive characteristic. Hence it follows that be it on the old stage of the secularization or the new stage of the postsecularism, Orthodox consciousness considers secular consciousness and secular person, in the first place, not as agents of reflecting reason and cognition, but as holders of certain lived experience. And it implies that deciding to start a dialogue with secular consciousness, Orthodoxy will try to develop this dialogue not so much on the ground of epistemological problems as on the ground of lived experience, that is anthropological experience, of both dialogical partners. Thus we conclude: for Orthodox consciousness, it is anthropological experience that is the principal ground where religious and secular consciousness meet and strike up the postsecular partnership. And it means that the postsecular dialogue in the Orthodox version will necessarily include anthropological subjects. Apart from this, the closer look at the PSP raises certain anthropological questions. Let us turn now to these anthropological aspects of the postsecular theme.

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<sup>7</sup> J.Habermas. Religion in the public sphere // European Journal of Philosophy. 2006. 14(1). P.9-10.

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First of all, let us trace the anthropological links of the PSP. Forming up the basic concept of the postsecular, we reconsider and re-analyze the dual structure: *the religious, the secular and the relation between them*. The two sides of this structure, the religious and the secular, what are they? Usually they are considered as two types or formations of consciousness such that the first type is characterized by the constitutive relation to the transcendent (Absolute, divine, etc.) while for the second type the constitutive relation is that to the immanent (the Ego, society, world, etc.). How essential is the difference between them? We have the alternative: a priori we can consider these two *formations of consciousness* as corresponding to the same *anthropological formation* or two different anthropological formations. Evidently, their difference is of personological nature. Religious consciousness and secular consciousness implement different paradigms of personal constitution, which implies that corresponding human persons have different structures of personality and identity. Adopting the personalist view characteristic of Russian philosophical tradition, we accept that personology is a core of anthropology, and the basic personological category, the constitution of personality, is also anthropological category. Nevertheless we do not merge completely the personological and anthropological levels and do not identify the concepts of personological formation and anthropological formation: any anthropological formation can *a priori* include persons having different structures of personality and identity and so belonging to different personological formations. Also we do not identify the "constitution of personality" and the "constitution of a human being", since the latter, contrary to the former, includes bodily constitution. However, we do accept that if religious consciousness and secular consciousness produce different constitution of personality they also correspond to different paradigms of the constitution of human being. The latter are anthropological paradigms, and thus we make in this way our choice in the alternative: we conclude that religious consciousness and secular consciousness belong to different anthropological formations. It means that *Religious Man and Secular Man must be introduced as conceptual personages*; and, as a result, the concept of the postsecular has the anthropological dimension in which it represents a specific dual anthropological configuration, the couple Religious Man – Secular Man developing dialogical partnership.

*Ex definitione*, these two personages are bearers of religious and secular consciousness, respectively, and they implement different paradigms of human constitution. The corresponding paradigms can be described by means of notions of synergetic anthropology. Here all the set of paradigms of anthropological constitution is represented in an unified way on the basis of the universal concept of *anthropological unlocking*: it is supposed that a human being constitutes himself in his extreme manifestations in which he makes himself unlocked or open towards the Other that does not belong to the horizon of his consciousness and experience. (The full set of extreme anthropological manifestations is called the Anthropological Border.) In terms of this concept, the Religious Man implements the paradigm of the ontological unlocking: his constitution is formed up in his unlocking towards the Ontological Other that belongs to a different horizon of being. As for the Secular Man, he is defined by the negative predicate of rejecting the religious position. Such definition does not prescribe any concrete paradigm of constitution to him, and as a result, he can implement all the paradigms of constitution except those based on the ontological unlocking. Thus he represents a mixed anthropological formation, and basing on synergetic anthropology we can describe the principal components of this formation which are as follows:

- 1) the Ontical Man whose constitution is formed up in the unlocking towards the unconscious;
- 2) the Virtual Man whose constitution is formed up in practices of the going-out into anthropological virtual reality;
- 3) the Borderless Man whose constitution is formed up in the actualization of the cognitive and technological relation to empiric reality conceived as the infinite Universe. This actualization is achieved in such practices that are not extreme anthropological manifestations and so do not belong to the Anthropological Border (having such constitution, a human person believes that he/she is borderless). The Borderless Man is convinced that man's destination is infinite cognition and technological appropriation of the infinite Universe, and he denies

actively the strategy of man's self-realization in the relation to the transcendent (the Ontological Other). He is the bearer of the Cartesian and Enlightenment ideals of rational knowledge, and, *ergo*, it is he who was always the main champion of the secularization and the main opponent of the Religious Man.

As described by synergetic anthropology, there is a certain dominating anthropological formation at each period of history, and historical process can be presented in its anthropological contents as the process of anthropological evolution conceived as the successive change of this dominant formation. The formation of the Borderless Man was dominant for the most part of the Age of Reason and Modern Age, but to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. the domination of the Ontical Man started to take shape. This formation constituted by patterns of the unconscious, both individual and collective, is in many respects opposite to the Borderless Man; in particular, it is governed mainly by irrational drives while the Borderless Man has rationalistic Cartesian consciousness. However, both formations share negative attitude to the Ontological Man and Religious Man, and in the Ontical Man this attitude becomes even more acute. As Lacan said, "The true formula of atheism is *God is unconscious*"<sup>8</sup>, which means that consciousness governed by the unconscious is truly atheistic consciousness. As a consequence, the secularization which was developing actively during the domination of the Borderless Man continued no less actively during the domination of the Ontical Man in the 20<sup>th</sup> c. The phenomenon of totalitarianism needs careful analysis, but one can say, loosely speaking, that it corresponds in its anthropological structures to the formation of the Ontical man. Here we discover the anthropological background of the fact that totalitarian regimes and liberal democratic systems (belonging anthropologically to the formation of the Borderless Man) being so different in other aspects, are close to each other in their relation to religion.

Now, in the last decades the next change of the dominant formation takes place, and the formation coming to the prevalence is that of the Virtual Man. Its relation to the secularization and post-secularization is very different from that of the preceding formations, and the main reason for this is its specific nature. Virtual phenomena are defined by the property of incomplete actualization: for any virtual phenomenon there is some actual phenomenon such that the former differs from the latter only by the lack of some of its essential features (dimensions, basic predicates, structural characteristics, etc.). All virtual practices are only partial, under-actualized reproductions or remakes of some or other actual practices. On the other hand, such practices are countless and infinitely diverse since any actual practice or phenomenon has, in principle, a boundless set, a "cloud", of its virtual satellites, or under-actualized versions. As a result, the Virtual Man does not implement any new irreducible paradigm of human constitution; but, instead of it, he can *a priori* implement incompletely, or "virtualize" all the existing paradigms. It means that all mutually incompatible or antagonistic anthropological formations become perfectly compatible after their virtualization. In particular, together with the virtualized versions of the Borderless Man and the Ontical Man, the Virtual Man implements also the virtualizations of the Ontological Man. Examples of such virtualizations abound in the New Age movement, in psychological techniques based on the elements of spiritual practices, in numerous quasi-religious communities and groups spreading all over the world and practicing improvised and simplified – that is virtualized – versions of every possible religion and cult. And it is evident that here there is the ground for the ideas of the postsecularism. The virtual anthropological formation does not exclude or reject any other formation; quite the opposite, it presupposes them all and depends on them. Hence the Virtual Man can easily adopt the postsecularist idea that religious consciousness and secular consciousness should coexist and develop dialogical partnership. In other words, we find that the formation of the Virtual Man is particularly favorable to the PSP, and their connection can be considered as a *sui generis* anthropological interface of the PSP. One can add that the Borderless Man (whose formation is still present very noticeably) can also choose the postsecular strategy if his rationalistic reason tells him that it is needed for his survival or other pragmatic ends. The evolution of the position of Jürgen Habermas is a striking

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<sup>8</sup> J.Lacan. The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis. Penguin Books, 1987. P.59. (Author's italics.)

demonstration of this. But for the Ontical Man following the patterns of the unconscious the participation in the postsecular dialogue is impossible.

Thus we presented the anthropological description of the sides of the postsecular dialogue. Next, we should describe the anthropological dimension of their partnership. In the course of the dialogue the Religious Man and the Secular Man are supposed to change their mutual relations from estrangement and hostility to interest and participativeness. They reconsider and reassess their relationship and discover some common features, uniting ground and resources for the rapprochement. In particular, secular consciousness learns to discern in itself some elements of religious consciousness which were already pointed out by Paul Tillich who wrote: "In the recesses of technological creation and in the structure of secular consciousness in general religious elements are hidden"<sup>9</sup>. He called these elements "quasi-religious". As for religious consciousness, in its Christian form it discovers the necessary resources, first of all, in the principles of Christian love and human communion in love. In all Christian confessions these principles are recognized as universal and global, embracing all mankind, in its religious as well as secular parts. Tillich writes as follows: "Love in Him [in Christ] embraces the Universe including both the religious and the secular"<sup>10</sup>. In Orthodoxy utmost importance is attached to prayer, and there are special prayers related to those of our fellow-beings who are especially distinct of and alien to us; there is also the "prayer for all the world" that was practiced zealously by st. Silouan of Athos, one of the greatest Orthodox ascetics of the last century. Thus Christian communion and love are able to remove the barriers between the religious and the secular and become motive powers of the postsecular dialogue.

If such dialogue goes on and deepens, it may affect personological structures of the partners, their modes of subjectivity and in prospect, may be, advance to a new "postsecular subjectivity". However, it is not expected that the partners will change their very nature stopping to represent, respectively, the religious and the secular. In other terms, they are expected to preserve their paradigms of the anthropological constitution which restricts the scope of possible personological and anthropological effects of the postsecular dialogue.

As for the subjects and themes of the dialogue, we said above that this dialogue enters the anthropological sphere when it focuses on lived experience of the partners. The main form in which this experience organizes and manifests itself is the form of anthropological practices and trends. Anthropological trends are produced by both the Religious Man and the Secular Man; they form up the present anthropological situation and determine its development. They are numerous and extremely diverse, but we do not need to discuss them all. Instead of it, we notice that it is some definite kinds of such trends that are of interest and importance for the postsecular dialogue. In the first place, this is *radical trends* that bring new and unintelligible anthropological dynamics and lead to drastic changes of anthropological reality. The present situation is particularly rich with such trends which continue to multiply and become more and more popular and widespread. Their principal kinds include various techniques producing altered states of consciousness, psychedelic practices, extreme bodily practices, practices of inhabitation in cyberspaces and other virtual practices of all sorts, and last but not least, post-human trends such as strategies directed to the creation of cyborgs and genetic mutants. Many of them bring challenges, risks and dangers, and related anthropological changes include, at least in the case of the post-human trends, even the prospect of voluntary disappearance of man as such. It is important to note that radical anthropological trends and related risks and dangers are produced not only by the Secular Man, but by the Religious Man as well. There are politicized religious movements that use extreme practices such as suicidal terrorism, radical sects including those with totalitarian rules, etc. Moreover, the spheres of the religious and the secular are not separated sharply nowadays when the global virtualization is going on. The borders become eroded, and the vast intermediate area of quasi- or pseudo-religious phenomena emerges.

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<sup>9</sup> P. Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. Moscow, 1995. P.403. (In Russian.)

<sup>10</sup> *Ib.* P.434.

In this complicated and muddled situation the postsecular dialogue focusing on radical trends may be one of efficient and sound strategies. The subject of such dialogue should be sober analysis of acute problems and vital issues from both the religious and secular viewpoints, and common search for answers to challenges and risks of present-day world. This dialogical partnership taking into account the key role of anthropological experience and focused on the destiny of Man can be seen as corresponding to the Orthodox vision of the postsecular paradigm. And synergetic anthropology that relies on both the religious and secular approach to anthropological reality can be seen as a field of studies where this paradigm is already in action.