

Secularization and Secularism

We have to distinguish between secularization and secularism. Secularization does not mean a world without religion, as already mentioned, but a world in which religious authority and its ministers no longer determine, as the final authority, what may go on in society. Secularism, however, designates the negative aspects of secularization, namely: the absence of any public mention of God, the organization of public life without a basic reference to God, and ultimately the intentional denial of God and opposition to faith in God. In this way of understanding the world, God is looked upon as non-existent, superfluous, or even obstructive. Secularism often results in practical atheism, which might not deny God explicitly but manages to do without God, putting in His place power, property, pleasure, etc. The fundamental values of family and society disappear, especially the values of community and solidarity (Puebla 57). That leads further, especially among the young, to frustration, isolation, and dependence on drugs, alcohol, gambling, and other forms of bondage (see Puebla 58).

A natural scientist does not need God in order to explain the world. If he or she wants to be taken seriously, he or she must act "as if there were no God." That does not mean they cannot believe in God in their personal lives. Atheistic humanism goes further than this. It declares that there is no room for God when we recognize people for what they truly are. If people are to rule, God must be set aside. Ludwig Feuerbach (+1872), the father of atheistic humanism, wrote: "The purpose of my labors is to make men anthropologists and not theologians [specialists in men and not in God]; to lead them from love of God to love of men and from hope in a beyond to the tasks of earth." He called on people to keep faith with this world, "which Christians have abandoned."

Christians certainly did not assume their social responsibilities satisfactorily when, in the course of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of factories in Europe, the poor and even children had to work long hours every day in order to survive. An English bishop is reported to have said: "Nothing helps make the wheels of a factory turn better than belief in God." This brand of religion, which we look on today as foreign to truly biblical and Christian religion, helped bring about secular humanism and Marxism. The Second Vatican Council took note of the fact that Christians "bear a measure of responsibility" for atheism. When they misrepresent the church's teachings, as that bishop, or fail to satisfy their religious and social duties, "they hide rather than reveal the authentic face of God and of religion" (GS 19).

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