

A Prelude to Christian Post-Modernism III: The Failure of Two Cities

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The third installment of my essays on Christian post-modernism. This time it discusses the failure of religion as well as secularism.



Published on
Booksie

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The continuous secularization of the state and the creation of laws contradicting the teachings of Christianity has to some been a victory of a continuously secularized state. The separation between church and state is slowly being defined. In the Philippines, the enactment of the controversial House Bill 4244 to Republic act no. 10354 signalled a start of secularization. In a strongly religious country like the Philippines, the enactment of such a law may start a domino effect of other proposed laws, which might make the local bishop piss his pants in fear.

The liberal starts to feel the victory, seeing a thousand year institution lose its ground on society, and thus the liberation of man from a band of bigot priests becomes a reality. The amoral becomes free and the freethinkers started to wave around the banner of reason. The priest will kneel at the altar of the Lord, fearing the collection plate might become empty in the future and the state would get the idea of taxing the church. The separation of church and state, an idea discussed by intellectuals, political philosophers and theologians alike, is a complicated theory mixed with theological and doctrinal differences. While different churches have their own stand concerning this issue, they all have one argument in common. Either for complete separation or mutual agreement, the argument boils down to fundamental issues held in contradiction by both parties.

A state may have a set of rights it upholds; the church on the other hand, has its own interpretation concerning foundational matters like the beginning of life, the composition of the family, the concept of marriage, etc. When any issue collides with the strong line of contradiction between two parties, the issue of church-state relationship becomes fresh like an old scab you just keep scratching just in case.

The reason why I brought the church and state issue in this article is to begin a prevailing idea that secularization is the ideal dream, a *telos* for a completely atheistic society independent of religion. Its goal is based on a several propositions.

Reason should govern people's lives. This argument simply highlights science supremacy on truth. The dependence on the acquisition of evidence and the overcoming of the burden of proof becomes the chief goal of society. It seeks to create a society of enlightened people. The same idea held by the enlightenment movement during the 18th century.

Freedom should be upheld. In my own words, I think this captures the idea wherein there should be no coercion whatsoever from any institution regarding choice. Whether to have an abortion or a divorce, the decision remains on the person and that man or woman should be provided to explore the choices they wanted to. So, if they want an abortion, there must be abortion clinics available. If homosexuals wanted to get married, gay marriage should be made into law. Again, the word liberty is pressed absolutely.

Religion is a brainwashing institution. Rather contemporary by nature, this proposition contains some spectres of orthodox Marxism. Marxists hold that religion is an instrument for the maintenance of the *status quo* by becoming the opium of the masses, giving them psychedelic illusion of afterlives through mental manipulation, e.g. the beatitudes. The intricacy of this proposition comes from a wide array of sources like Max Weber and Karl Marx just to name two main thinkers.

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Outlining these three propositions although not exhausting others as well, we can already get a very loose picture of what secularization tries to achieve. In simple words, "the church failed and now man must be independent." Whether you follow a socialist approach or a liberal approach, the difference is on the government of economics. The grand altar of economics is again filled with offerings. Since economics controls every fibre of our life, the management of material is thus important. How we govern them matters. Both socialism and liberal capitalism sought exhaust possible means to achieve economic prosperity for all. Secularization, they think, is one of the means.

It does remind me Ancient Rome. Although Rome had a state religion the movement is religion serving the state. Varro in his *Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum* (a book unfortunately lost and only Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* is a detailed source of its general outline and content), affirms that there might only be one creator worshiped by philosophers. State religion rather is an orthopraxy, uniformity in ritual and not in belief. (King 2003, 298) Varro's civil theology is pluralism of ritual and cults and not of theology. In a nutshell, consider taking a course on theology with nothing but sacramental theology. The natures of deities are reserved for poets and playwrights to describe. What then is its relationship with the secularization movement? Secularization seeks to remove mainstream religion from its hegemony. A radical secularization seeks a complete atheism in society, independent from a God of religion, agnostic to a God of creation.

Let us say, it is achieved. I believe some events during the French Revolution might occur again. Although Catholics were persecuted when the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790 was in effect, another religion turned out. The *Culte de Raison* and the *Culte de L'Être Supreme* turned out as the replacements of the old religion. Similar events might happen in a secularized society. However, this time there might be an ocean of choices, from a scientism to a wave of New Age neo-paganism.

Augustine magnifies love as the principal mover of society. Earthly love is directed at temporary things and deplores itself in pleasure. Love for God is directed to God and obedience to his will. The confusion starts when we start applying society under two categories. I shall maintain that the state is not the earthly city or the church is the City of God. From that, we can conclude that both are pilgrims. In a society torn apart from a vice filled populous (One should just read the lives of the early emperors after Augustus to find out and the field is plenty from books to film. *Caligula* of Tinto Brass, produced by Bob Guccione would be a start just to summarily execute your brain and eyes and prepare you for what critics call a "moral holocaust") like Rome, a declining Empire is somewhat similar to our society.

Everyday, the Id of the young slowly replaces the superego of the old. Clothed in basic protection of human rights and freedom of expression, these sublime rights are sacrificed on the altar of a secular dream. Secularization is more of a dream than a reality. Remove religion and God, but still humans will think and create various practices although not clothed in a religious language game the logic remains. Let me call it a "dystopian orthopraxy." Even without a god or a maintaining a deist stance, a religion will arise from that cult and the establishment of a uniform rite and belief is a dogma *per se*.

In that sense, both the church and the state failed. The modernist salvation through science will ultimately fail. It will create a mechanized society and everything is defined by facts. A totally religious society becomes neurotic, the social unconscious will explode whether in a secularized society or not. In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the strict religious observance of Alexis Karenin can't handle Anna's unfaithfulness nor can Constantine Levin's agnosticism help him in his marriage. The relationship between the secular and the sacred, or the church and the state is like a mixture of oil and water we can't really handle as it goes inside into the human collective psyche. A pragmatic way might be to just live with the contradiction and sometimes art becomes a bridge.

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