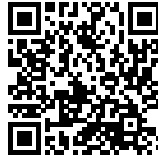




ONLY A GOD CAN SAVE US

Posted on October 1, 2023 by Brian Patrick Bolger



The modern occidental world, roughly from the Renaissance onwards, sprang from a secularization of culture and its culmination is the main reason for the polarization of the contemporary world. The modern phase of culture has seen an antinomy of opposite values squeezed together, like a nuclear fission, a building of energy and dissonance and spewing out its contents in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. This was the ambivalence of the Platonic- Christian world against the spectre of "reason" raging like tectonic plates. After Plato had brought man down from a cosmic order of the "holy city," and introduced reason to the world, it was only left to Kant to make God immanent in the human mind. The death of God was then accomplished by Marxism and exhibited in its sibling—liberalism. Nietzsche had articulated where this "decadence" came from, and in his mind, decadence was the affirmation of the nihilism of the liberal world and all its monstrous contradictions. It was for him, beyond good and evil. He had foreseen the "polemos of night" creeping in, manifested in the blackness of the twentieth century, from the First World War to Stalin, to technological death. It was the secularization of the world, a period of "total mobilization" where the human subject (the worker) becomes one of industrial atrophy, mobilized in work and in war. Total mobilization is achieved by incorporating every facet of life into technics. It is not the end of history, but the apex of a Spenglerian cycle of decadence.

Carl Schmitt noted the essence of values of modernism in that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts." So, the fundamental questions such as God, of morality, of society are secularized theological ideas. Liberalism being the successor to Christianity. At the same time this secularization of salvation was seen in the parallel contortions between democracy and liberalism: democracy coming out of a Greek emphasis on participation in the *polis* and Liberalism as one of limiting participation (representative democracy) and community. The culmination of the tensions, this build-up of energy in the twentieth century, its decadent nature, is the "secularization of man." The events of the twentieth century (the First World War, the Russian Revolution, Mao and Stalin), are the manifested practical events of a political philosophy shedding its vestments for the lore of materialism. Our modern world is nothing other than the secularization of worlds. But in this was the overarching dominion of reason; a dominion which Kant himself had forbid, as he stated that the quest for the limits of knowledge was to "make room for faith." Although he later went more secular with his *Opus postumum*, Kant had calibrated the point at which reason becomes self-defeating. Therefore, liberalism is based on an erroneous conception of its own origins; the *Albertian monks* after a nuclear winter, adrift in the wasteland, with no books, drawings or tragedies—would assume that the liberal world was, in fact, completely irrational.

So, there is an encompassing heuristic secularization from the Russian revolution onwards, yet one

based on the ghosts of Christianity; theology then secularized. The contemporary liberal sentiments, of diversity and equality, adrift in this sea of anonymous individualism, cling to the flotsam of Enlightenment values, the residues of Christianity. Del Noce called it the "history of the expansion of atheism." Yet we are not here talking of organized religion. We are highlighting the turn from the sacred to the profane. What Patocka called the loss of the "care for the soul." Liberalism adopts quasi-religious symptoms and constructs a diabolical otherness: "populism," "Catholicism," "community," are denoted as "heresies" from orthodoxy, hiding this painful denouement to the twentieth century. History is shrouded then in the motifs of secularization and progress. Anything else is "unreason." Whilst the French Revolution started the motifs of Christian relic values in liberalism, transposed to Russia, and then rolled out through liberalism and materialism—the Cold War was merely a logical outcome of materialist *Grossraum* competition. This was only realized late on by Marxists such as Adorno, Horkheimer, when they realized that liberalism was a partner of Marxism. So liberal faith has morphed into purely cultural realms, i.e., sexuality, gender, race. Marxism realized then the paucity of a material philosophy and resorted to abandoning the working class for the now ephemeral values of the contemporary milieu. The variations on a theme in the liberal canon are all rooted in one source: the valorization of Christianity into liberalism, and its resurrection into nihilist secularity. The sacred has been firmly buried. What began as the Schmittian inheritance of theological concepts has descended into pure secularity.

The "truth" and the "good" are taken down from the altar of the sacred, from a metaphysical position. But what replaces it? Nietzsche had proclaimed that a new set of values are necessary amidst the death of god. Historicism comes alive, there are no metaphysics anymore. The explanation is rooted in the "now," there are no permanent features of morality or values, they are constantly transcended, it is the Heraclitan river rushing and formless, the "eternal return," a punishment by the gods for abandoning them. The transcendence from the sacred involved three steps. The first was the Copernican scientific revolution. It was followed by the grounding of liberalism in this scientific ethos. And the final step was the contemporary ennobling of economic liberalism into cultural liberalism. It is the final phase of the Liberal Cycle which began during the Renaissance. Yet there is a forgetting. The triumphs of cultural liberalism are assembled like relics on a cold alabaster altar with no knowledge of their origin, except for a vague remembrance that it is right, or correct, or should be: a Kantian imperative with no forefather. For there is no real essence to secularization or now its hybrid forms of LGBTQ and gender shaking, a peculiar softness and sensibility surrounds liberal rights; easily offended by a remark, a gesture, whilst bodies stack up in a graveyard near Bakhmut.

Now it seems nothing is sacred against the liberal behemoth. In a recent address the Pope took aim at

“conservative” thought, especially those inclined to sacred thinking within the Catholic Church:

I want to remind these people that backwardness is useless, and they must understand that there's a correct evolution in the understanding of questions of faith and morals that allows for Catholic doctrine to progress over time.

Secularization works by a continuous dismantling of tradition and the sacred. In this all innovation, art, AI, works by constant “progress.” These features, like theatre, literature, art, only have value if they are constantly seen to be moving, shaken. This becomes so vacuous that only a nihilism is left behind, devoid of eternal truth or good. In fact, any form of morality is in an eternal revolution. The west's liberal Marxism is engrained into institutional settings, in government, in corporations: this march through the institutions by the Frankfurt School, opposing democracy and populism, a trojan horse of secularism, is merely the elites *mutatis mutandis*: having opposed liberalism they then set up and work for it. So, opposition to liberalism and secularism, in all arenas, blends with the original, due to its essential nihilism.

These two plates then, Christianity and Liberalism clash in this confusion of modernity. Russia, never at home with Marxism, clung to orthodox sacred values. The present conflict is, in fact, a residue of the two plates still in opposition. Russia having residual claims to the sacred, whereby the true intellectuals of Russian life, like Dostoevsky, Ilyich, espoused a rural, blood-and-soil sacredness. Therefore, *homo progressivus* is not universal and this can be seen also in Chinese *Tianxia* in the way it expresses a cultural reformation rather than a colonial one. In essence it is particularity which opposes the tsunami of secularization and liberalism works by a push back against any heresy. Islam, *Tianxia*, Pan-Slavism, Eurasianism, Communitarianism, are always “the other”—the savage in the colonial jungle, that sickly border post with Captain Kurtz surrounded by skulls.

The complete dismantling of Plato; the separation of *polis* and God, marks the modern secular world. It is democracy, however, which should be sacred, which needs the “holy city” as a sacred guide. Yet liberalism removes democracy, community, participation. Plato had envisaged the “city of God” where the *polis* is enlightened by the sacred, by the good. But in the contemporary occidental world only echoes of the theological remain, in a vast ocean of secularity. A practical example lies in the prelude (and cause) of the war in the Ukraine. The [*US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership*](#) was, *de facto*, an alliance for secularization. As well as a military alliance and potential incorporation of Ukraine into NATO, it spoke of “fighting racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and discrimination, including against

Roma and members of the LGBTQI+ communities." This is universal secularization in action; it has little to do with strategy or geopolitics. It is colonial exchange. It fights against the heretics, imposes a world view which attempts to negate the theological Platonic world of the sacred. Therefore, the Ukraine war is not seen as merely a resource war, but a war about culture, a war about the triumph of secular values. The odd championing of nationalism of the Ukraine seems contradictory in the light of domestic opposition to such movements (the Basque, Republicanism in Ireland, Populism). However, as long as it serves in the secularization crusade, then the Ukraine flags will wave from the town halls of Europe and America. On a philosophical, historical stage of Spenglerian cycles, the war will be seen as a battle for the "value" of the world, between secular liberalism and the remnants of a holy sacred city.

The human *polis*, separated from the sacred, reverts to the ordinary, to the secular. Life becomes a simulacrum of the sacred, the values of Christendom replaced with the values of a liberal secular credo. Art, politics, religion become a daguerreotype of secularization. The Holy City, replaced by Bentham's circular "Panopticon" prison, is defunct. On the contrary, there is pushback by the civilizational states against this conquering secular monism. That is, states such as Iran and Russia, see the survival of their cultural realm, their civilization, as existential, and not in the limits of their state frontiers. Civilization consists of an idea, a telos. States consist of artifice and progress, of material scarcity, of the borderlands.

In Bulgakov's [*The Master and Margarita*](#), one of the characters exclaims:

"You're not Dostoevsky," said the Citizeness, who was getting muddled by Koroviev.

"Well, who knows, who knows," he replied.

"Dostoevsky's dead," said the Citizeness, but somehow not very confidently.

"I protest!" Behemoth exclaimed hotly. "Dostoevsky is immortal!"

Brian Patrick Bolger studied at the LSE. He has taught political philosophy and applied linguistics in Universities across Europe. His articles have appeared in various magazines in the US, the UK, Italy,

Canada and Germany. His latest book is [*Nowhere Fast: Democracy and Identity in the Twenty First Century*](#).

[Featured](#): *The Burning of Troy*, by Agostino Tassi; painted ca. 16th-17th centuries.
