

WHO IN THE WORLD AM I?

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Some clarification about the title is needed. The title raises the problem as to what man is from the point of view of the secular historian. The question is not what man actually is in relation to or as a member of his present society. This question more properly belongs to sociology and other related social sciences that are behavioral in nature, and is not a question raised by historians. The question more relevant to historians is: What are those historical factors that brought about the secularization of modern man? To put it in another way: What are those ideas throughout history that led to the development of man's secular character? In effect, these questions belong more properly to the history of ideas. Once these questions have been answered, another one can be raised: What are the main characteristics of modern man that have been brought about by these historical transformations?

To be noted in the topic is

the qualification "secular". This qualification is significant because man can be viewed as a creature developing historically in accordance with a Divine plan, a view asserting that History is nothing else but a process manifesting the work of Providence. This view is not a purely historical one and represents an approach that pertains to what may be termed as a philosophy of history. It is the rejection of this theological-historical approach that makes possible an alternative view, and this is the secular approach in understanding history.

The term "secular" has been, historically speaking, an antithesis to the term "theological," "ecclesiastical," or "religious." However, sometimes "secular" has been used in the sense of "profane" or "non-religious." In this case, it means something that is not religious but not necessarily something irreligious. I do not intend to use the term secular with this latter connotation. The term will be used in a sense not only radic-

ally different from the religious point of view but as something referring to the rejection or the claim of irrelevancy, if not outright condemnation, of the religious view in the understanding of man's historical development.

The secularization of man, more precisely of some men, is an historical phenomenon and must be explained by historical forces. It is oftentimes maintained that modern man is a secular man, and it is here that one must be careful of his terminology. This claim might be taken to mean that modern man is becoming more and more secular or that the terms "secular" and "modern" are identical. The first alternative is verified by an analysis of contemporary events. If the second alternative is accepted as valid, then it will follow that not all men in the contemporary world are modern; for certainly a great part of the world population still look at life from the religious point of view. Actually, the bulk of mankind at present is not at all completely secularized.

Strictly speaking, what is meant by secularization as a phenomenon of modern man, pertains to both Western man and European history. It is thus significant to speak about the secularization of

Western culture. However, nowadays, we are also witnessing a relative secularization of some Eastern cultures, principally that of China. The case of Japan is similar to that of Western nations. But to be pointed out and emphasized is that the secularization process in Eastern countries had its inspiration from the West. It is the introduction of Western science and technology, and a Western ideology, that is speeding secularization in Asia. It is also the impact of Western culture and technology and its material challenge to Islamic culture that will eventually bring about a relative increase of secularization in Islamic countries.

The problem to raise at this point is to discover those historical factors that brought about the secularization of Western culture. Once these factors are known, it will be easier to know what secular man thinks today.

It is essential to begin with Western medieval culture and medieval man. The secularization of Western culture cannot be understood except as a reaction to medievalism. (The term "secular" is what is called in logic a "referent," that is, it involves a "relatum;" for example, the term "child" involves "parent" and

you cannot have one without the other.) In brief, what is secular involves the connotation of a departure from something, and this is the religious view that flourished luxuriantly in Europe during the medieval ages.

The medieval ages adhered to the theological conception of man. The earth was the center of the universe, and man, the creature of God, was placed in it to glorify his Creator. The Augustinian distinction between the earthly city and the city of God and the prescription to actualize the latter as a duty of all Christians were principles permeating the medieval outlook. A neat theory of the universe expressive of the medieval desire for order, was nowhere better presented than by Thomas Aquinas. To Aquinas, creation followed a well organized plan — the eternal law. The movements of the planets, the laws of science, the imperatives of moral behaviour, the end of man, etc., all found their respective niches within this eternal law. That aspect or portion of the eternal law applicable to the moral prescriptions of man and discoverable by his reason was called natural law. Now, man's collective experience led him to produce human law, which,

on account of Original sin and limitations of his intellect, was not perfect. Consequently, natural law was posited as a corrective to human law. Yet in the Divine Plan, there was something else in store for man. On account of the need for salvation and since reason had its limitations, Revelation was necessary. This was Divine law, a law supplementing human law. Divine law made possible what Christians call "grace" and eternal bliss. All these, in a nutshell, was the medieval conception of law. Every thing had its proper place and relations within the general scheme of things. This view could certainly serve to give man some security and answers to his "big" questions.

(To be concluded)

HEBREW . . .

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students from interested countries can follow a month's training course in Jerusalem, on every aspect of the student press from typing to budget control and equipment supervision. Already a Greek student, Theodosius Kontopoulos, from Salonika, received training at the press early in 1961 after having obtained a travel grant from WUS. (UNESCO)

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