

SECULARIZATION AND THE CHRISTIAN OF TODAY

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It has been said that secularization has contributed to the individual's loss of identity. The Christian is, thus, a face in a crowd; he is the anonymous character of modern society as in Ortega y Gasset's *Revolt of the Masses*; he displays a metaphysical horror for the impersonality of life and for the loss of the mystery of things in the city as Rilke's hero in *Notebooks of Melte Lauridi Brigge*, he is the nameless characters of Kafka's novels, *The Castle* and *The Trial*. And because he is anonymous, the Christian appears to be cold and even heartless; his relationships, therefore, tend to be divested of their really human substance; they are made mechanical and lifeless.

Secularization in modern society has accelerated mobility. Industrialization, which has immensely contributed to the secularization of our times, has indeed lured people off the farms into the cities. This has in turn led to the shallowness and lostness of modern urban man, the diminution of spiritual values, rootlessness and alienation. The Christian of today is always on the go, possibly best illustrated by Kafka's nameless character in *The Castle*, who enters courtyards and rooms, only to find out that there are other courtyards and rooms awaiting his directionless and meaningless voyage. Thus, because man is lost to his more sedentary setting, he has had no time to ponder on the intangibles that are the longings of the human spirit. Because of his mobility and of his

preoccupation with the here and now, he has lost sight of the hereafter, and his directionless meanderings has further led to seemingly unbridgeable gaps between himself and his God.

And where remnants of traditional religion still remained, man has found it convenient to relativize religious world views; he has, indeed, privatized them to the extent that he has accepted religion as a peculiar prerogative and a particular point of view.

It would seem that the more he moved, the more he brought himself away from his Creator. And because mobility has dimmed his vision, his sense of perspective has become distorted, and he has found it convenient, in the fashion of his day, to declare the death of his God.

This alienation from God has given rise to the lack of a sense of direction and an absence of the proper sense of values, and has led to tensions and to all psychological aberrations imaginable. The Christian has, therefore, to find means by which to release these tensions if he is to maintain his balance. But the means he has devised — the cinema and television, books, magazines, and other mass media — have only created further tensions. Indeed, some are apt to call these amusements aphrodisiac entertainment. Sex, ultimately, has become a god.

To be sure, secularization exploited sex in its aphrodisiac advertising campaigns. Thus the Christian, whether adult or adolescent, has been bombarded with the most skillfully contrived array of erotic stimulants ever amassed.

As a result, there has been a noticeable increase of sex crimes in recent years, and among the young, pre-marital virginity had better been left to books on moral theology. In more advanced societies, the divorce rates, the number of abortion cases, legal and illegal, the number of unwed mothers and of those who indiscriminately use the pill to prevent the burgeoning of life, have increased in frightening members. And also in less developed societies, also as a result of secularization, it has been the same.

Secularization has also introduced impersonality in man's work. Not only has man's place of work been separated from his place of residence;

not only has work been transformed more and more into bureaucratic forms of organization; as it were, attempts have been quite successful in taking away from work the religious character that it has retained from the period when it was interpreted as a spiritual discipline. Not only has man's work been made impersonal; a sense of vocation in his work has also been lost. Man's work is, therefore, nothing else but a means of livelihood; its spiritual meaning has been taken away.

Schools have not escaped the secularization of our times. God has been taken out of the classroom, under the guise of what has been bandied about as the separation of church and state. The study of theology, of philosophy, of classical poetry and music—the humanizing disciplines—has been neglected, and in their place were introduced scientific agriculture, sanitation, cybernetics, and metallurgy. While it must be granted that institutions of learning may indeed be the answer to the technical needs of our times, the point may be raised whether or not these same institutions have not contributed further to man's impersonality and alienation.*

Now how is the individual Christian to act in the secular world of his own times?

The Christian of today must, first of all, accept all these happenings as part of God's plan for mankind. Thus, he will place everything in the right perspective. If indeed the Christian believes that nothing happens without God's will, then, the Christian will see in urbanization and the attendant secularization the will of God. The Christian will therefore bear up with these problems that secularization brings; he will even take advantage of them and make them contribute to his own perfection.

Amidst all the confusion and meaninglessness, he will not lose his identity. Aware of his being created in the image of God, of his role in the brotherhood of man, he knows that he is, in God's plan, brother to all the anonymous fellows in his milieu. Thus, he will find it a joy to pray for all those maddening crowds among whom he finds himself

* This section of this essay borrows heavily from Harvey Cox's. *The Secular City*.

in snarled city traffic, for the anonymous fellow beside him in the bus or the jeepney; he will feel compassion for those unwashed, emaciated slum-dwellers who he passes by everyday on his way to work.

He will view mobility, not as one which has contributed to his rootlessness and alienation. He will face the issue squarely in the eye, and will even use it to have his roots implanted on an even wider environment. Knowing that he possesses the truth of salvation, he will nurture that truth by a continuous and a conscientious study of his faith. He will carry that truth to every place where mobility might bring him, and share it with others.

And because as a Christian he knows that his vocation is to love, he will not be alienated from his fellowmen; he will bring that love to them, by translating it to actions. And because love means selflessness, he will stifle that selfishness within him so that he can better share that love with others. Sharing that truth and that love with others, in the suburbs where he lives, in the office where he works, and in every place where God might put him, his motivations will transcend the purely personal; indeed, he will do everything in God's love.

And badgered from all quarters with aphrodisiac entertainment, and other erotic stimulants; he will not assume a holier than thou attitude, and with downcast eyes take the posture of a prude. Yet he will not be indifferent to all this, knowing as he does, that if nothing is done to help change the scheme of things, the young will be in great danger, sex crimes will increase, more illegitimate babies will be born or unborn, and family life will be disrupted. He will do something about the situation as his station of life and sphere of influence will demand it. He will do things quietly, believing that God want things to be done without fanfare and without glare of publicity.

He will bring God back to the schools, especially if his station in life makes it possible for him to engage in this apostolate. He will guide the young to have the right attitudes towards God and their fellowmen, believing that if he is successful in doing just this, he will have contributed something to the solution of problems brought about by secularization.

And he will look at his work as it should be viewed: as a manifestation of God's will. He will consecrate it from day to day, for work must be a consecration if it has to have any relevance at all. He knows that God had meant work to be a means by which he may perfect himself; thus, no task is too menial for him, and therefore he will give his best to everything he does, for to him work is in itself a prayer.

The Christian of today would, of course, be naive if he believes that it is as easy as all that. But he will continuously strive to inculcate in himself these points of view until they become an inextricable part of himself. Having become successful in doing so, he will then view secularization not as one over which he should weep interminably, but as an inescapable reality in God's plan.

More important, he will act in his own capacity as Christian educator, physician, lawyer, accountant, mass media man and bring God's message to everyone by the Christianity, the Christ-likeness of his very own life.