



Church and State, Church in State

Daniela Cârstea

English Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest, Romania

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to briefly analyse the three existing models regulating the limits and the areas of intersectionality between the spiritual and the lay power, recognisable and identifiable in the countries of the European Community, that made possible the noticeable onslaught of secularisation in (post-)modernity. The first section will then be supplemented with a sociologically-informed analysis of the increasing desacralisation of our world, employing as a starting point Matthew Arnold's poem, *Dover Beach*, foreboding the perils of loss of faith as early as the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Dechristianisation, Secularisation, Laicisation, Post-Byzantine, Social iconoclasm

1. Introduction

When we talk about the relationship between the State and the Church, we generally mean by "Church" the acknowledged Christian rites, hence in the present argumentative, discursive environment, references will be made to its concrete instantiations, namely the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Church (the order follows the criterion of sequential approach).

2. Literature Review

One relationship would be that of a total and radical cleavage between State and Church, specific to France, a reason why it will be called the "French model". A second one is the antipodal model of a total identification between the two, to be noticed pre-eminently in England, which will be named, for the sake of consistency, the "English model". The third and last one is the type of relationship existing in Germany, the "German model", on the principle of distinct cooperation.

By simplifying, non-polemically, the socio-religious history of the West, we could say that the utter severance of the Church from the State, which bore the seeds of a secularisation of the state, came in reaction to the Catholic view of the summum of both the lay, and the spiritual power in the self-same person: The Pope of Rome. (Monsma, 2009) Between the latter and the king of the nation a lengthy war was waged, throughout the centuries, and, we might add, a harmful one, too – if seen with a minimum of supraconfessional objectivity – for the unity of the Christian world.

This confrontation between sacerdotium and regnum will result in a theology of politics and a theological politics easily imaginable. If the theological politics of the State had ascribed, hereto, sacred attributes to the king, to the point where there could be talk of a Babylonian captivity of the Church in the hands of worldly rulers, in response to it came, henceforth, a political theology of Augustinian extraction, by virtue of which the Church was called to institute the kingdom of Christ on earth through the Pope's potestas directa in temporalibus. (Fergusson, 2005)

The model of radical separation directly inherits the doctrine of the French Revolution, expressed in the desire of dechristianisation of the public space, of separation without debris of the spiritual power from that of the State. (Thomasius, 2007) This means, concretely, the absence of financial support from the State, the uncertainty of the clergy's social status, compelled to resort to collateral activities in order to survive, the limited acceptance of religion in the public schools and so on. It is a model we could refer to as "social iconoclasm". It is a ghetto situation, in which "spiritual life is denied a social form." (Morris, 2009)

At the very opposite end we find countries where the State completely identifies with the Church, a situation in which Parliament represents the supreme authority in religious matters, while the Government financially supports, to a decisive extent, the activities of the Church. (Edwards, 1981) Such an example is England. In England, the Queen is not only the head of the State, but she is also the head of the Church, of the Anglican Communion worldwide.

Parliament promulgates the ecclesiastical laws voted by the general Synod. The Anglican bishops are appointed by the Queen, upon recommendation made by the Prime Minister and are lawful members of the superior Chamber of the Parliament.

The epistemological bases of this model were laid by Thomas Hobbes in his philosophical treatises, particularly in the *Leviathan*. In order to prove the political relevance of Hobbesian thought we shall undertake a cursory exposé of its tenets. According to Hobbes, “natural reasoning” could only assign “negative attributes” to God, such as “Infinite, Eternal, Incomprehensible”, or superlatives like “The Highest, The Greatest”, or, at last, “indefinite” ones, such as “Good, Just, Holy, Creator”. It would be rash to think that this is a way of proclaiming the possession of any knowledge with respect to the essence of God.

Because people can only know God’s infinite power over the whole of creation, the manifestation of His ineffable essence, hence people’s sole attitude toward God is veneration and obedience. To obey God’s laws is the greatest act of veneration, since God holds obedience dearer than sacrifice. (Hobbes, 1998) But the obedience we owe to God turns Him into a kind of absolute monarch, and the divine law is read as the ultimate political law. God, Hobbes shows, rules over the entire earth by virtue of his power. The holy books of the Bible make up the canon, namely the prescriptions for the Christian life, therefore these rules are as many laws. The Gospel forwards the rules that should reign supreme within the Christian world, consequently it intimates to each sovereign not the things which need, but those which must not be instituted in his/her republic. (Hobbes, 1998) The act of faith takes an essentially political significance with Hobbes. The kingdom of God which holy writings refer to is a political kingdom, not a spiritual one:

God’s kingdom in the writings of so many preachers, and especially sermons and allegiance treatises is commonly understood as eternal bliss in the after-life, in the highest heaven. . . never as monarchy, meaning the supreme power of God over all subjects, obtained through their consentment, which is in fact the real signification of kingdom. On the contrary, I find that God’s kingdom means, in most of the places in the Gospel, a kingdom proper, constituted, in a specific way, by the votes of the people of Israel, through which they chose God as king, through the Covenant, thereof God promising them the lands of Canaan. (Hobbes, 1998, 280)

It is obvious that what Hobbes envisaged was nothing less than the supreme rule of the church, which becomes, with him, a political corporation authorised by the sovereign. (Sachs, 2002, 51-3) Consequently, his definition of the church is that of “a company of people who profess the Christian belief, united in the person of a sovereign, on whose command they must congregate, and without whose authority they must not congregate.” (Hobbes, 1998, 321) Religion is, therefore, by excellence a civil one. Since the State concentrates into one single person, it ensues, according to Hobbes, that it must only have one “public worship”, which must needs be inherently uniform.

In The Evangelical Revival, David Edwards investigates the emergence of the Methodist Movement in England, who attempted, in line with the general reaction to the “religion of reason,” instituted in the aftermath of the French revolution, to run counter this obvious skewing from divinely-normed demeanour, an assertion of positive intensity in belonging to the Church. (Edwards, 1981)

Later on, Adrian Hastings will draw the contours of the establishment of the Welfare State in England, the political context in which it was implanted, the contribution of the Church to it, as well as the transitory jamming of the “mechanism” somewhere along the way, translated in the School Crisis, a situation which was illustrative of the fact that the concept of a Welfare State stood in need of correction and amendments. Notwithstanding, it was, for a while, a pleasant contact with a social reality which is individual-gearred, fostering the person’s well-being and welfare. (Hastings, 2001)

The third and last model we set ourselves as task to analyse is the one existing, paradigmatically, in Germany. In this country there works a system of liaisons and mutual obligations between the State and the Church, meant, on the one hand, to ensure the place of the Church in society, but also the Church’s support for the State’s social policy. (Wood, 2005) It is what specialists in the matter call the model of incomplete separation (*eine hinkende Trennung*): a model that equally postulates separation and cooperation. (Wood, 2005) Without competing or identifying with each other, a distinct cooperation is established between the State and the Church, where each knows its own responsibility.

At this stage of our analysis, a reference *pro domo*, a self-reflexive assessment and presentation of a possible Romanian Orthodox model would be appropriate. But we are currently at a point where neither the Church has exhaustively formulated its expectations from the relation with the State, nor the latter has contrived to formalise its approach, since, though amiable in declarations, it remains ambiguous in actions. (Preda, 2009) This lack of a principal orientation, which could serve as a point of departure for a possible “post-Byzantine” model and which could surmount the present improvisation and looseness of the relationship between the State and the Church is to a certain extent explainable in the wake of half a century of atheistic, agnostic domination and of exercise of “as you like it” in religious matters. (Dragostinova, 2016)

All in all, we can assert that the Church, though not being organically connected to any form of government, is able to engage in a positive dialogue with any political form. Placed beyond history by its very finality, the Church is no less present in the former's concrete episodes, just as Christ the Lord was in the Palestine of Pontius Pilate. Since "its ultimate purpose is not that of superseding the ruling organisms, its detachment can have tonifying effects." (Avramescu, 2007) The retrieval of the sense of eternity becomes, ultimately, a vicarious, yet beneficial retrieval of the sense of the *hic et nunc*.

3. Case Study. Matthew Arnold: Dover Beach – Forebodings of Secularisation

3.1. Textual analysis

Dover – one moonlight evening, Arnold stands at his hotel window and looks out on the calm sea and the lights of the French coast. His wife is with him in the room and comes to the window to look at the scene and catch the sweet night air. Arnold's most famous poem, *Dover Beach*, records this moment (although it seems that he first wrote the concluding section which begins: "Ah, love, let us be true / To one another..." on this occasion, adding the earlier lines on his return to London, where they were composed on the back of some old notes he had made on Greek philosophy for a poem on Empedocles).

It is not difficult to see why this is Arnold's best loved poem. Its plain feeling and music make an immediate impact. In the first few lines we are with him on that warm June night looking out across the English Channel, seeing the intermittent light on the French coast, the cliffs guarding the tranquil bay, and the waves breaking on the "moon-blanché" shore. Notwithstanding the calm beauty of the scene, it is invested with a sombre recognition of the "eternal note of sadness" sounded by the tide's ebb and flow. Like Sophocles looking out on the Aegean, Arnold sees expressed in that note of sadness "the turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery."

For moderns, the "Sea of Faith" which once surrounded them no longer comforts, and in consequence all that Arnold can hear is: "Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar." The third and final movement of the poem tries to reconcile the beauty of the world with which the poem opened and the melancholy truth into which it deftly led us, by the bridging mechanism of human love. Loving each other is the only certainty we can hold in a world bereft of faith's traditional sureties. The world itself – so full of surface delight – is actually illusory and when the mask is stripped away there is only anarchy and confusion (Smallbone, 2019):

"Ah, love, let us be true /... /
Where ignorant armies clash by night"

The poem, with its memorable image of the battle by night (derived from Thucydides' description of the Battle of Epipolae), has come to symbolise the Victorian loss of faith, the sense that what had always been believed had started to disintegrate, and that there was no sure guide on the way ahead. (Oulton, 2013)

(Although Arnold did appear to lose faith in Christianity, he remained a church-goer and a writer on theological subjects for the rest of his life).

4. Discussion

4.1 Modern Extrapolations. The Loss of Faith in Modernity – Early Analyses

In modernity, the sphere of religious manifestations has been considerably affected by emerging social and cultural transformations.

In Christianity in the West, John Bossy provides an interesting proposal for the status quo of Christianity in the West, elaborating upon the features of Protestantism and subtly analysing causes of sacralisation of the state. The key-note would be that the situation aforementioned was incurred by a gradual separation between the idea of the sacred and its phenomenological form, which ceased to be its vehicle – a cleavage effected to the degree where the sacred is not a locus any more, but a function of the mind, a mere abstraction. (Bossy, 2005)

The evolution of the religious in modernity has been classically expressed through the concept of secularisation-, which became paradigmatic in the 1970s. Talking about the secularisation of the religious implicates the fact that religion no

longer is what it was. According to Donald Drakeman, the age of Lights, the French Revolution, the progress of science, the assertion of the individual, they all disturbed the traditional religious order and imposed an unprecedented development of the symbolic, which we witness nowadays. (Drakeman, 2010)

For sociologists, secularisation emerges at the beginning of the century, as an unavoidable process, religion being ineluctably disqualified in its relationships with modernity and the process of rationalisation. Be they Marx, Durkheim or Weber, they all announced the loss in influence and importance of religion in modern societies.

For Karl Marx, who deemed religion as opium for the people, the former was bound to disappear at the advent of the classless society and at the end of alienation. For Emile Durkheim, religion had to be replaced with a sort of a lay religion consisting of a moral that would allow an enhancement of the social cohesion. (Durkheim, 2008) Last, but not least, for Max Weber the progressive disenchantment of the world does not inevitably lead to the disappearance of religion, but to its marginalisation. (Weber, 1993)

For a lengthy period of time, analyses favoured interpretation in terms of loss, privatisation and marginalisation of the religious and, consequently, of disappearance of faith, of abandonment of praying places and of communitarian religious practices. The rumour spreaders even announced, in the '70s the death of God.

This desacralisation of the world through the transformation of the sacred into the lay sends us to the Durkheimian concept of functional differentiation, which presupposes that society progressively assumes all the lay functions priorly fulfilled by religion. The process of laicisation (representing the autonomisation of the social areas from religion) has often been associated with that of secularisation, in order to underline the impact of rationalisation of the religious phenomenon in modernity. (Hamburger, 2002) This process of laicisation basically presupposes the fact that, due to the development of lay institutions, religion becomes an institution among others, losing its globalising, dominant dimension.

Another characteristic element, connected with the notion of secularisation-differentiation is the pluralisation of the religious offer and the emerging situation of free competition on a rule-free market.

Secularisation can be understood, John Madeley thinks, in terms of a loss in influence of the big traditional religious organisations (following an erosion of the supernatural) or, more radically, in terms of a process of rationalisation which reassesses the very idea of religion. (Madeley, 2003)

Among those aspects of modernity which enable secularisation and the dimming presence of religion and of religious experience in society one could mention the removal of death from the sphere of the probable and the liberalisation of eros. (Madeley, 2003) We witness a sort of an eclipse of the sacred and of religion, accompanying the evolution of secularisation, thus inducing another, different vision and perception on eros and death. It is a gradual replacement of the mythical thought with the scientific, positivist thought.

Despite appearances, secularisation means neither the end or the demise of religion, nor the disappearance of the imaginary and the irrational, but is equated with a process of transformation of the socio-cultural dimension of religion. This global socio-cultural mutation is translated through a decrease in the institutional and cultural role of religion. The latter has lost its social influence, only to become a domain among others of the social sphere. The secularised religion is no longer the globalising framework of society, nor is it the ultimate finality of its order. It announces an inevitable demise of religion, equivalent, for J. F. Collange, with a dechristianisation, which unremittingly gnaws at Churches. (Collange, 2009)

Nevertheless, this secularisation which repositions the global socio-cultural status of religion does not evolve following a logic of the irreversible continuity. It is incomplete and non-completeable. Incomplete – because it always preserves some influence on society and on individuals, and non-completeable – because in a society where the professional practices are very rationalised and the social system very secularised, it is highly possible that religion preserves a minimum of authority in order to help the symbolical thought on the human condition and to integrate death ritualistically. (Collange, 2009)

4.2. Post-modern Reassessments

After the '80s we notice a change in the analysis of secularisation.

Recent research in the social science of religions shows that religion has not disappeared from the socio-cultural scene, but was recomposed on a pluralist and individualist pattern. We witness, in the very framework of the paradigm of secularisation, a pluralisation of religious beliefs. According to the logic of the symbolical market, we can perceive the appearance of a multitude of competing world visions. The individual relationships entertained with religious organisations (like the church) have become supple and optional. This engages a process of individualisation of the act of believing or not, as Grace Davie notes, of believing without belonging. (Hervieu-Leger & Davie, 2006)

5. Conclusion

This attachmentless belief constitutes an explosive pluralism, which is the sign of the recomposition of the secularised religious in late modernity. The relativisation of believing, paralleled by a search of a useful belief and of Truth favours the appearance of a religious offer centred more on the search for senses and welfare than on the non-native commandments of traditional religions.

Robert Audi believes that, in late modernity, the religious knows an emotional renewal and a return to ecstasy. (Audi, 2011) The author thinks that we witness, nowadays, a powerful development of new forms of effervescent practices, under the shape of emotional communities. This emotional upsurge is accompanied by an explosion of original forms of belief, where each assembles his/her own catalogue of beliefs out of disparate elements, resulting in a diffuse, eclectic religiousness, which mingles beliefs and practices borrowed from diverse traditions and which are decontextualised.

The religious paradox of secular societies makes possible the cohabitation of a historical process of secularisation of modern societies with the development of an individual religiousness, mobile and mouldable, making place for unique forms of religious sociability.

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