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THE POST-SECULAR TURN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PRACTICE OF SCIENCE

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In this article, the author tackles the post-secular turnaround in the context of practising science, and as such how this manner of thinking has affected how science, its tasks and its practical activity is perceived by those practising it. Initially two fundamental concepts are discussed, namely secularisation and post-secularism – their pedigree and ways in which they are expressed. The article deals later with issues related to the presence of religious references in the natural sciences, as well as the possibilities of utilising the natural sciences in religion and theology. Consequently, the area of issues embraced by the new scientific sub-discipline known as the theology of science is discussed. The article then addresses the discourse regarding the presence of theology and religion in sociology, and refers to the conceptions of such sociologists as P. Rieff, K. Flanagan, Z. Krasnodębski, E. Hałas and K.T. Konecki. Finally, it indicates possible further consequences of post-secular thinking in the field of sociology, and relates the current post-secular turn to Nikolai Berdyaev's concept of the New Middle Ages.

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Secularisation and the post-secular turn

Originally, secularisation was a term referring to the confiscation of church property, as well as to secular powers taking over offices from the ecclesiastic institutions. When it comes to the suppression of monasteries, dissolution was the most frequently used term. In the contemporary academic discourse,

secularisation has acquired a much broader meaning, which characterises the general process of diminishing the role of religion in the course of social development. Religious institutions begin to lose influence on social life and secular institutions, while religious symbolism ceases to permeate through different segments of culture. According to Hubert Knoblauch, there are three distinct aspects of the process of secularisation.¹ The first among them consists in the declining importance of religion in society; secondly, religion undergoes a differentiation, i.e., religion becomes one of the independent institutions without any influence on other social institutions; thirdly, religion is privatised.

Also at the level of individual life, religion's importance is declining, and religious norms are no longer a strong factor regulating human behaviour. Thus, secularisation can occur at different levels of human life. Peter L. Berger distinguishes objective secularisation, i.e., happening at the social-structural level, which also includes the sphere of culture and symbols, as well as subjective secularisation, which occurs at the level of consciousness.²

Secularisation can also be an evaluative term. On the one hand, anti-church circles have perceived it as a positive process, which allows for men to be liberated from the influence of religion, while the Church circles saw it as a process of de-Christianisation and a fall-back to pagan times. However, after the Second World War – especially in protestant circles – secularisation processes came to be seen as an ally of authentic Christianity, which allow for its deepening and cleansing. Franco Crespi went even further in his comparison of the lives of Christians in a desacralized reality to those of the first followers of Christ: “secularisation seems to move the Christian to the times of Christ and the preaching of the gospels, into an uneasy situation of a small apostolic group.”³ While Antonio Grumelli, in his paper *Secularisation between religion and atheism*, demonstrates that due to this ambivalence of secularisation, it is possible to see it as “a possible meeting-point between faith and unfaith.”⁴ It would therefore play a significant role in fostering dialogue between believers and non-believers.

¹ H. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion: Auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt – New York 2009, pp. 16-27.

² P.L. Berger, *Święty baldachim. Elementy socjologicznej teorii religii*, Kraków 1997, p. 173.

³ F. Crespi, *Proces sekularyzacji: od desakralizacji do religii*, in F. Adamski (ed.), *Socjologia religii. Wybór tekstów*, Kraków 1984, p. 403.

⁴ A. Grumelli, *Sekularyzacja pomiędzy religią a ateizmem*, in F. Adamski (ed.), *Socjologia religii...*, p. 406.

According to Berger, who relies on the analyses of Max Weber, the roots of secularisation should be sought in ancient Israel, where the process of disenchanting the world began.⁵ However, in his view this process was stopped by Christianity.⁶ Following Berger's line of thought, secularisation could be seen as a non-linear process, which may strengthen at some points, and subside on other occasions. Hubert Knoblauch also considers the thesis of linear secularisation to be false. He provides an example of societal religiosity rising during modernisation – in the United States the percentage of church-goers rose from 17% in 1876 to 62% in 1980.⁷ In the history of Europe, the processes of secularisation as well as their reversals can be seen in various places and periods. A secularising current can be attested in the 14th-century thought of Marsilius of Padua,⁸ as well as in the situation in the village of Ars in the beginning of the 19th century. Saint John Vianney took over its parish, whose secularisation went so far that its inhabitants were said to be differentiated from animals only by their baptism. Then there is the 19th century Polish social thinker Antoni Morzycki (publishing under the pseudonym A.M. Mora), who harshly evaluated his contemporaries thus: “amidst the general tumult, no acquiescence is there for any rule, there is no accepted certainty”⁹ and “this contemporary societal world heeds not and understands not the ways the lord.”¹⁰

The above examples merely constitute an illustration of the thesis of the strengthening or subsidising of the waves of secularisation. This subsidising has nowadays been named post-secularism. It seems worth considering at this point some other conceptual questions, as on the one side there is a frequently used notion of secularisation, and on the other the notion of post-secularism. There also remains, nevertheless, the term secularism, which has clear ideological undertones, unlike the term secularisation – that is only referring to a particular process. It seems therefore that the term chosen to refer to the process of the return of religion and the sacred to society should be post-secularisation rather than post-secularism. Nevertheless, the totality of actions and processes aiming at boosting the role of religion in the contemporary world is usually referred to as post-secularism, and it will

⁵ P.L. Berger, *Święty baldachim...*, pp. 165-166.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 167.

⁷ H. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion...*, p. 17.

⁸ Cf. Marsyliusz z Padwy, *Obrońca pokoju*, Kęty 2006.

⁹ A.M. Mora, *Fundamenta budowy społecznej zastosowane do Narodu Polskiego*, vol. 1, Poznań 1852, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

also feature with this meaning in the present article (I am also going to use the term “post-secular turn” to refer to these processes).

Even though the contemporary discourse on post-secularism is often based on the reflexions of Jürgen Habermas, and especially on his speech in the Frankfurt church of Saint Paul in 2001¹¹, yet, post secular tendencies had existed long before that event. One could say that secularisation and post-secularism constitute two processes happening one after another – when one declines, the other gains strength. The already mentioned Antoni Mokrzycki described some secularising processes, while predicting the reversal of this trend, when humanity shall “enter the path of truth leading through the harmony of social elements towards God.”¹²

Post-secularism can be understood as an answer to secularisation processes and to secularism. On the one hand, one can point to many occasions in the history of Europe where on some territories the reversal to sacrum occurred, together with the renewal of religious life, and an increase of the importance of religion in public life; and on the other hand, there is also the criticism of secularism on the part of many prominent thinkers. Apart from Habermas, one should also mention Leszek Kołakowski, whose publications often pointed to the vital importance of the presence of religious values in the individual and social life. Of special significance in this respect seems to be the unfinished and only recently published essay *Jesus Ridiculed*, which was written in the mid 1980s.¹³

The return to sacrum was also written about by Grumelli in 1971; he used the then known term – “resacralisation.” He claimed that “on the one hand, this process is a psychologically understandable reaction to the overly strong pressure of words proclaiming a religious crisis, and on the other hand, it follows from the assertion that contrary to all the crisis, there is an indisputable reinvigoration in the religious domain.”¹⁴ The criticism of the theory of secularisation by philosophers and social thinkers has been on the rise especially since 1980s. Krzysztof C. Matuszek points to three distinct reasons for this post-secular turn.¹⁵ The first among them is the vigour of non-Christian religions observed by the inhabitants of the secularised

¹¹ J. Habermas, *Wierzyć i wiedzieć*, “Znak” 9/2002.

¹² A.M. Mora, *Fundamenta budowy społecznej zastosowane do Narodu Polskiego*, vol. 2, Poznań 1853, p. 167.

¹³ L. Kołakowski, *Jezus ośmieszony. Esej apologetyczny i sceptyczny*, Kraków 2014.

¹⁴ A. Grumelli, *Sekularyzacja pomiędzy religią a ateizmem*, p. 412.

¹⁵ K.C. Matuszek, *Ortodoksja refleksyjna. Problem postsekularyzmu w świetle teorii systemów społecznych*, “Stan Rzeczy” 2/2013, pp. 234-235.

West. Secondly, the activities of the Christian churches became globally revitalised. And thirdly, a cultural offensive of the left-liberal circles caused a counter-offensive on the part of the conservatives.

Post-secularism and the natural sciences

Post-secular thinking has an impact not only on social questions, but also on the practice of science. The relations between faith and science have been an object of reflection over many centuries, and the intensity of those considerations was highest when what we nowadays call post-secularist tendencies would be on the rise. In this part of my analysis I would like to take a look at the contemporary attempts at bridge-building between religious as well as theological thinking and scientific thought. Before I venture to present specific proposals, it seems worth appreciating them from a more general perspective, which indicates that humans use three different forms of cognition in order to get to know the truth about reality: religion, art and science. Those forms are complementing rather than excluding each other. At different points of the history of humanity they would be closer or further apart from each other, but there was a time when they were united. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz wrote about this using the example of ancient Egypt: “Religion, philosophy and science constituted one single domain of the human spirit struggling against the inscrutable Mystery of Being. The indiffereniable unity of those spheres was typically in the hands of the initiated priests. Science was only in its infancy and the little known forces of nature were interpreted as an expression of the will of supernatural beings, and metaphysics existed only in the form of religious faith.”¹⁶ The relations between science and art were also explored by the 20th century German artist Joseph Beuys, who created his own extended concept of science.¹⁷ According to Beuys, all human knowledge had once been contained in art. The two spheres started to separate in the course of history, and in the modern era their dramatic antagonism arose, which was caused by the fact that science submerged itself in a one-sided materialism and lost the capacity to grasp the spiritual reality. Beuys proposed a model of cognition within which scientific thinking, based on rational principles, is active so far as it does not reach

¹⁶ S.I. Witkiewicz, *Nowe formy w malarstwie i wynikające stąd nieporozumienia*, Skierniewice 1992, p. 115.

¹⁷ Cf. J. Kaczmarek, *Joseph Beuys. Od sztuki do społecznej utopii*, Poznań 2001, pp. 35-37.

its proper limits, whereby it swiftly turns into cognition through art, which is based on intuition. This standpoint seems convergent with that of critical realism, which aims at demonstrating the relationships between religious and scientific thinking. It postulates that reality has a stratified nature and an investigation of each stratum requires the utilisation of relevant methods.

A prominent example of combining theological reflections with the natural sciences comes in the form of the theology of science – a branch of knowledge outlined by Fr. Michał Heller in early 1990s, even though the first articles concerned with this subject were written by Fr. Heller and Fr. Józef Życiński in the 1980s. Naturally, specific constitutive elements of the theology of science appeared earlier in the works of different authors and in various contexts. Fr. Heller defines the theology of science as “an authentically theological reflexion on the sciences: on the fact of their existence, on their foundations, methods and results.”¹⁸ It is supposed to use its own methods to investigate science. On the other hand, the natural sciences can and should also enrich theological thought through the newest findings. Theology of science and the natural sciences share the same object of inquiry, i.e., the Universe created by God, but theology has a broader cognitive horizon, as its sight reaches such realms which are not reachable by empirical research methods. According to Fr. Heller, both of the branches of science are interrelated and they should aim at breaking with their mutual suspicion and independence. The theology of science is supposed to be concerned with two features of the world which fall beyond the capacity of scientific understanding, namely, the contingency of the world, and the values present in this world. The former makes plain that “the world in its existence is completely dependent on the Creator”¹⁹ and this fact should become an object of analysis by the theology of science. The latter is concerned with values which also exist in the material world, as it was created by God, and thus it is an effect of a purposeful, rational action, thanks to which the Universe is permeated by values.

More precise areas of research in the theology of science can include many other questions. One of them concerns the relations between religious and scientific thinking within a person that happens to be a scientist as well as a believer. As it was put by Adam Olszewski: “It seems impossible to extract just the scientist from the man as an individual. The scientist is a human being, i.e., an integrated totality, which includes skills and knowledge necessary to do science, but also a specific set of values (morality), and

¹⁸ M. Heller, *Nowa fizyka i nowa teologia*, Kraków 2015, p. 150.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 152-153.

sometimes (when it comes to the faithful) a set of convictions concerning the questions of the existence of God and His properties, that is a fragment of theology.”²⁰ Therefore, if humans are integrated totalities, then postulating a suspension of religious belief in the process of scientific cognition would amount to some form of schizophrenia and would result in a disintegration of the whole cognitive process and the world-view of a given person. Thus, it would seem that it is exactly within post-secularism that a possibility is opened for animating and legitimating religious and theological thought within scientific practice. Another area of interest for the theology of science is constituted by the issues related to the ethical dimension of scientific practice. In this age of the great expansion of the natural sciences, theology can provide certain indications concerning the values to which scientists should adhere while pursuing their work. This seems to have been aptly formulated by Robert Janusz, who stated that a “laboratory without oratorio might turn into a crematorium.”²¹ The progress of human knowledge is one other possible topic. According to theological considerations, humans were endowed with higher cognitive capacities and participated in the divine omnipotence before their banishment from Paradise. This changed following the original sin, but henceforth the human knowledge has been constantly growing. The role for the theology of science would come in the form of the following two issues: “1. to determine what this increase of the level of knowledge about the world would consist of; 2. to present theological arguments for this increase.”²² Finally, another vital question for the considerations of the theologians of science should come in the delimitation of the boundaries of scientific thought, as well as in attempting to explain the source and nature of those limitations.

Theology of science emphasises that science does not preclude the existence of spiritual reality, and that, in fact, it can actually support it by way of proving its existence and the existence of God. This was observed by Czesław Miłosz, who wrote that: “the scientific discoveries of the 20th century were supportive of religion, as opposed to those of the previous centuries.”²³ One could mention in this respect the example of research by John Carew Eccles, an Australian neurophysiologist and a Nobel Prize

²⁰ A. Olszewski, *Punkty styczności pomiędzy teologią a nauką*, in J. Mączka, P. Urbańczyk (eds), *Teologia nauki*, Kraków 2015, p. 104.

²¹ R. Janusz, *Nauka i wiara – naturalne i nadprzyrodzone*, in J. Mączka, P. Urbańczyk (eds), *Teologia nauki*, p. 110.

²² J. Dadaczyński, *O niektórych (możliwych) obszarach badań teologii nauki*, in J. Mączka, P. Urbańczyk (eds), *Teologia nauki*, p. 82.

²³ C. Miłosz, *Polskie zżymania*, “Znak” 10/2001, p. 26.

winner. His theory – known as dualist interactionism – clearly stated that all psychological phenomena cannot be products of matter, and that they are emanating from a spiritual reality. In humans, the immaterial mind works through the material brain, and thus the two spheres interact. Death causes a separation of those two realities: the immortal soul is separated from the body. Eccles refers to the newest discoveries of quantum physics, which seem to undermine the materialist claims: “The materialist critics argue that insuperable difficulties are encountered by the hypothesis that immaterial mental events such as thinking can act in any way on material structures such as neurons of the cerebral cortex [...] Such a presumed action is alleged to be incompatible with the conservation laws of physics, in particular of the first law of thermodynamics. This objection would certainly be sustained by the nineteenth-century physicists and by neuroscientists and philosophers who are still ideologically in the physics of the nineteenth century, not recognizing the revolution wrought by quantum physicists in the twentieth century.”²⁴ Richard A. Carhart – professor emeritus of the University of Illinois in Chicago – speaks in a similar vein: “In this way, without detriment to the reliability and honesty of methodology and subject matter of scientific research, one could assume a working thesis that the source of life could have had an actual supernatural source. In reality, this thesis is irrefutable as all the known physical and chemical phenomena are incapable of spontaneously (naturally) producing a living cell.”²⁵

In European intellectual history, there have been plenty of biological and cosmological proofs for the existence of God. Classic examples can be found in the works of Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas. However, also in the contemporary reflexions, based on the newest scientific discoveries, there are new such proofs known as the theory of intelligent design – they presume that the world came into being thanks to an Intelligent Creator – which can be supported by many natural facts. One variety of this theory is known as the entropic creation. It states that the parameters of the Universe are finely tuned so as to make possible the emergence of life and of humans. Even the slightest changes to those parameters, such as for instance Planck’s constant, would make the existence of life impossible. This theory might lead, but does not necessarily need do so, to the thesis that there exists an external causal factor that should be identified with God.

²⁴ J. Eccles, *A unitary hypothesis of Mind-Brain interaction in the cerebral cortex*, “Proceedings of the Royal Society of London” 1990, p. 446.

²⁵ R.A. Carhart, *Nauka powinna uwzględnić działanie Boga*, <http://www.fronda.pl/a/nauka-powinna-uwzledniac-dzialanie-boga,58496.html> [access: 28.12.2015].

The natural sciences play an important role for theology, which implements their discoveries. It comes down to their judgements whether particular events are qualified as miracles during beatification or canonisation proceedings. If such a judgement is confirmed, and an event is proved to be inexplicable from the point of view of science, it is then recognised as a miracle. Scientific discoveries have always had an influence on the development of theology. This was emphatically expressed by Fr. Michał Heller: "In essence, theology has always been under a significant influence of the sciences and the scientific picture of the world dominant in particular historical periods. If theology is a reasoned reflection upon religious truths, then it has to take the standards of reasonability from somewhere. Such standards are the product of science (writ large, including philosophy). If theology is also an interpretation of religious truths, then these truths must be interpreted in a broader context. This context is always provided (openly or covertly) by the picture of the world shaped by the sciences."²⁶ An example of the utilisation of the discoveries of the natural sciences in theology is presented by the contemporary reflexion concerning the theology of the Trinity. Of special interest seem to be the inquiries into the Holy Trinity, which use the newest discoveries of quantum physics. These mostly concern the utilisation of the theses concerning the relativity of the quantum world in the analogous considerations of the inter-constituent relations within the Trinity, as well as of the relationship between God and the world. At this point, one could refer to the ideas of Ernest L. Simmons, whose theological reflexions were based on two basic notions taken over from quantum mechanics, i.e., quantum entanglement and superposition, as well as to the early considerations of Joseph Ratzinger, where we also find reflexions on the Holy Trinity in the context of the newest discoveries concerning the wave-corpuscular nature of matter.²⁷ An interesting concept of mono-trinitarian metaphysics has also been put forward by Zbigniew Jacyna-Onyszkiewicz, a professor of physics.²⁸ It is based on the assumption of the existence of omniscience in the Universe, which can be identified with a Uni-trinitarian God. It is from omniscience that the other of His attributes stem: "singularity, tri-personality, transcendence, immanence, immortality, omnipresence, love and omnipotence (non-contradictory with His essence)."²⁹ Jacyna-Onyszkiewicz based

²⁶ M. Heller, *Nowa fizyka...*, pp. 12-13.

²⁷ Cf. R.J. Woźniak, *Modele z nauk ścisłych we współczesnej teologii trynitarniej. Przyczynek do teo-ontologii relacji*, in J. Mączka, P. Urbańczyk (eds), *Teologia nauki*.

²⁸ Z. Jacyna-Onyszkiewicz, *Wszechwiedza*, Poznań 2002; idem, *Monotrynitarna tajemnica Boga*, Poznań 2008; idem, *Akosmizm*, Poznań 2015.

²⁹ Z. Jacyna-Onyszkiewicz, *Akosmizm*, p. 82.

his metaphysical considerations on the newest discoveries of physics and cosmology. He demonstrates at the same time that these discoveries take us closer to metaphysical interpretations, as the explanation of the causes of some physical phenomena lays firmly beyond the capacities of the natural sciences.

The post-secular turn in sociology

The consequences of the post-secular turn can be observed not only in the natural but also in the social sciences. In this part of my considerations I would like to point out several examples of such a turn occurring in sociology. The first among them comes in the form of the work of Philip Rieff (1922-2006). According to Zondervan, he made an attempt to “introduce transcendence as a conceptual category to the social sciences.”³⁰ These words give an accurate expression to the meaning attached to the notions of transcendence and sacrum by Rieff. He assumes that the sacred order is primary, and the social order is only secondary. This leads to the criticism of Durkheim, for whom the sacrum was but a social construct. For Rieff, Durkheim’s vision is unacceptable, as he posits that the sacrum must always have a transcendent reference. Furthermore, he considers the French sociologist to be complicit in the decline of metaphysics, and presence of the sacred and spirituality in western societies. In consequence, contemporary sociologists are supposed to be incapable of describing real social changes, as their world-view is based on a fiction. This brings us to the concept of three cultures put forward by Philip Rieff.³¹ The first among them is the culture of fate, where human life was dependent on blind fortune, and governed by accidental fate. The second culture is that of faith, within which the social order meets the order of the sacred, and the faithful accept the revealed truths. The third culture, which Rieff construes to be dominant in the contemporary West, is the culture of fiction, which he considers to be one of anti-culture, rejecting revealed truths, religion and the sacrum, and thus initiating a barbarian era. He considers the second and third cultures to now be at war. Such an approach is resonant of the idea of the New Middle Ages, whereby Bierdiajew conceived of a spiritual deadly struggle between the forces of good and evil.

³⁰ Cyt. za: M. Lubańska, *Losy sacrum w “świeckiej epoce.” Émile Durkheim versus Philip Rieff o “sakralnym” i “świeckim porządku,”* “Stan Rzeczy” 2/2013, p. 223.

³¹ Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 224-230.

Another example of post-secular thought in sociology is fostered by the ideas of Kieran Flanagan. This British Catholic, who turned atheist in his student years, came back to Catholicism in his later years. His return to faith happened in an unusual way and had far-fetched consequences – also for his academic activity. In his own words, “To my own surprise my religious sensitivity was revived thanks to the choir singing during a casual visit to an evening service in the Bristol Anglican cathedral in 1975. This influenced my spiritual and sociological imagination [...] Having seen the Anglican version, I moved to another cathedral in Clifton. In this new place, possibly even to a higher degree than I would be willing to admit, my Catholicism took shape and sprouted roots. This experience allowed me to find the resources of wisdom and persuasive doctrines.”³² Thus, it was art that provided the impulse which pushed Flanagan back to faith. From that point onwards, his inquiries focused on the liturgy and on the visual.³³ He treats such phenomena of religious life as prayers and other rituals not only in social terms but also as going outside of the social, and having transcendent, reference. This creates a meeting point between sociology and theology, whose cooperation is necessary for understanding the contemporary man. Without including both those spheres, our understanding would only be partial. Therefore, akin to Rieff, Flanagan also rejects the understanding of religious phenomena only on the basis of social references.

It is also in the Polish sociology that we can meet discussions of the presence of post-secular tendencies. Zdzisław Krasnodębski refers to Habermas’ reflection on the role of religion in society. He remarks that one of the questions stated by the German philosopher, concerning “the place of faith in liberal democracy and the modern civilization,”³⁴ did also occur in the Polish post-1989 context. These issues frequently come to the fore in Krasnodębski’s works, and constitute a very important element of his reflection on the condition of contemporary societies and of contemporary science. In his essay on Habermas, he states in the opening sentences: “The tension between the secularised society and religion became a central question of our times.”³⁵ Without accounting for the role of faith and religion we remain incapable of answering the questions concerning the meaning of individual

³² K. Tester, *Refleksja zarówno socjologiczna, jak i teologiczna: rozmowa z Kieranem Flanaganem*, “Stan Rzeczy” 2/2013, p. 153.

³³ Cf. K. Flanagan, *Seen and Unseen: Visual Culture, Sociology and Theology*, New York 2004.

³⁴ Z. Krasnodębski, *Żmudny przekład*, “Znak” 9/2002, p. 62.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

and collective life. Therefore, post-metaphysical philosophy stands helpless in front of existential questions: “post-metaphysical philosophy has nothing to tell us in situations of non-culpable suffering, in the hour of our death.”³⁶ These questions were also tackled by Krasnodębski, in his earlier work concerned with the idea of progress. He states there that “today one is not without reason to doubt whether we can do without religion when it comes to moral questions”³⁷; adding a few pages later that “science not only has not given any answers to moral questions, but also has undermined the received answers.”³⁸ This leads to the questions concerning the crisis of science, to which Krasnodębski refers by way of discussing the ideas of Edmund Husserl. The spiritual crisis of our times consists in “doubting the validity of any norms, any ideals,”³⁹ which in turn has its roots in the contemporary science infused by scepticism and nihilism: “nihilism and scepticism are the threat which appears as the direct consequence of the rise of scientific rationality in its current forms.”⁴⁰

Elżbieta Hałas expressed criticism with respect to the possibility of combining theological reflection and social theory, as she treats sociology, social theory and theology as different cultures of knowledge. She claims that “between sociology and theology there is no direct relationship, and no project of making it happen shall ever be successful.”⁴¹ It is for this reason that she refuses to accept any such proposals as those of Kieran Flanagan. On the other hand, Hałas does not deny the possibility of sociological explorations of religion, but this should always exclude the supernatural element. The Polish sociologist also allows for the use of sociology in theology, for instance in pastoral theology, where sociological methods can be useful to investigate religious movements and organisations. While writing about the relations between theology, sociology and social theory, Elżbieta Hałas concentrates her attention on such theology that does not have its roots in Revelation, but rather on such a kind that has been shaped under the influence of the modern humanities on theology, namely, firstly the historical and then the social sciences,⁴² i.e., on comparative theology. This constitutes a

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 66.

³⁷ Z. Krasnodębski, *Upadek idei postępu*, Warszawa 1991, p. 272.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 276.

³⁹ Z. Krasnodębski, *Postmodernistyczne rozterki kultury*, Warszawa 1996, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 15.

⁴¹ E. Hałas, *Między odrzuceniem religii a zbawianiem świata: itineraria socjologii i postsekularnej teorii społecznej*, “Stan Rzeczy” 2/2013, p. 23.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 17.

specific kind of theology, which is not the only one used in sociology. Juxtaposing the ideas of Hałas with those of – for instance – Flanagan, we can see two different approaches to the possibility of the presence of theological and religious concepts in sociology. On the one hand, there is the view that transcendence cannot be taken into account while investigating social life, which has to be treated as a reality *sui generis*. On the other hand, there is the idea that in order to provide satisfactory and complete answers to the questions directed at the meaning and essence of social life, one must include the metaphysical factor connected to faith, religion and transcendence.

A special place on the map of post-secular reflection on the presence of religious thinking in sociology is afforded to the reflections of Krzysztof T. Konecki, which concern the practice of meditation stemming from the Buddhist Zen tradition and the possibility of its utilisation in the work of a sociologist. What this mostly entails is a number of epistemological and methodological inspirations that may prove useful in sociological research. According to Konecki, the importance of Buddhism for sociology stems from the fact that it can “more directly and in more detail provide an inspiration for the development of sociological concepts, carrying out social research or analysing data, or even theorizing about society.”⁴³ He does also emphasise that the Buddhist idea of direct sensory perception, which may be difficult to render in scientific knowledge, proves close to the ethno-methodological approach, where the observation of non-verbal forms of behaviour does lead to the understanding of the Other. Further, he mentions the eight assumptions comprising the Eightfold Path, which are supposed to allow for the perception of things as they truly are. Three among these assumptions have a vital importance for sociological understanding: the right view, the right mindfulness and the right meditation.⁴⁴ The right view is making the sociologist aware of the inconstancy and changeability of ideas, concepts and notions (Konecki associates that with the notion of the variable in sociology), and it also leads to the questions concerning the presence of suffering in the world, which is of special importance for the practice of engaged sociology. The right meditation allows, in turn, for gaining direct knowledge of social reality, without presuming any initial assumptions, as well as of the investigators themselves, just as it happens to be the case in auto-ethnography. The right mindfulness allows for the discovery of corporality, and feelings,

⁴³ K.T. Konecki, *Jak socjologowie mogą skorzystać na praktyce medytacji?*, “Przeгляд Socjologii Jakościowej” vol. 11, 4/2015, pp. 54-55, www.przehladsocjologii.jakosciowej.org [access: 21.12.2015].

⁴⁴ For a more in-depth explanation of those terms cf. *ibidem*, pp. 58-59.

connections between the individual consciousness and the community, as well as the meaning of our investigations and notions which we use. The end-result of meditation comes in the de-construction of the self and a subsequent re-composition of its essence, which in Konecki's view should further lead to the deconstruction and construction of concepts, which should in turn influence the ways of conducting social research. Other consequences of the meditative approach come especially in the acceptance of the view that all signs are deceptive and faulty, as well as all words and sentences, and in the embrace of the role of intuition in the practice of research. Concluding his reflections on the functioning of the sociological mind, Konecki claims that "going beyond the existing methods and concepts we can achieve direct insight into the matters which are the object of our interest."⁴⁵ In such a case the question would arise as to the exact point of sociology's existence, but it is no one that the author would give an answer to.

Ending this part of my consideration of the influence of post-secular thought on the practice of sociology, some other topics seem worthy of consideration which result from references to faith, religion and theology, and may be of use in sociological research. These do obviously comprise a selection of possible discussion points, yet, as they constitute phenomena associated with the life of the community, they are fully disposed to becoming objects of interest on the part of social researchers. Firstly, a return back to the interest in the natural law might seem in order. Rich literature has been devoted to this topic, and still it is only sporadically undertaken within sociology, while it might prove to be an important voice in the discussion of contemporary democracy and its foundations. Secondly, one could consider the relations holding in the City of God, for instance in the community of angels. There are multiple forms of evidence, not only exclusively Christian, which describe the communities of pure beings. Such beings are of course objects of theological analysis, and yet it is also sociologists that might find interesting inspirations in those reflections, such that one might find some uses in the analyses of terrestrial societies. Once the very term City of God is used, this brings about associations with the work of St. Augustine, which constitutes a form of inspiration for social researchers to this very day.⁴⁶ Kieran Flanagan wrote about it in the following terms: "This study is an effort to understand the plight of those who live as strangers away from their homeland."⁴⁷ These words stem from the reflection on the life of the

⁴⁵ Ibidem, pp. 82-83.

⁴⁶ Cf. G. Tinder, *Święty Augustyn a współczesność*, "Barbarzyńca. Pismo antropologiczne" 7-8/2002.

⁴⁷ K. Flanagan, *Seen and Unseen...*, p. 10.

City of God on Earth, yet, they sound especially prescient when used – for instance – in reference to the situation of immigrants. The work of St. Augustine would seem to open up new avenues of understanding with regard to this problem. Thirdly, one could focus on the revelations of St. Mary, especially those that directly concern social issues, such as war, coups and revolutions. Content analysis could be used, as well as comparative research, in order to confront the results with contemporary social conditions. The fourth topic could be constituted by the visions of existence both in heaven and hell, which could be subjected to sociological analysis just as the revelations of St. Mary. Of essence in this respect would be to reflect on the social conflicts as the underlying causes of this state, as well as on the influence of the visions of social and cultural reality. Fifthly, the topic of possession should be of some interest, as it has become an increasingly frequent presence in spiritual life. Sociological research could focus on the social causes of such states – for instance, curses, occultism or Satanism. And finally, the ecological questions would be of interest, but seen from the point of a wider frame than hitherto, i.e., one that would involve cultural and religious values, with reference to the transcendent reality. Such an approach is presented by Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato si'* – it treats of integral ecology, i.e., one that involves the care of man in a totality of natural, cultural, economic and religious references. Saint Francis is presented as an example by the Holy Father: “an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human.”⁴⁸ It was already Roger Scruton that wrote about the religious elements in ecological thinking, pointing out that the care of the Earth as a gift from the creator was present already in Ancient Israel, and his conclusion runs as follows: “it seems to me that we will not understand what is really at stake in the environmental consciousness that has captured the imagination of so many people today, if we do not recognize a religious memory at the heart of it.”⁴⁹

Summary

One may speak of the post-secular turn not only in relation to the recent years, but in fact that such turns have been occurring more frequently in

⁴⁸ Ojciec Święty Franciszek, *Encyklika Laudato si'*. *W trosce o dom wspólny*, Kraków b.d.w., p. 11.

⁴⁹ R. Scruton, *Oblicze Boga. Wykłady imienia Gifforda 2010*, Poznań 2015, pp. 154-155.

different periods and places, by way of following periods of secularisation. Thus, both tendencies – the secular and the post-secular – are interconnected and occur in turns. Contrary to the statement of some researchers, secularisation does not constitute a linear process, which is bound to fully expel religion from the individual sphere, and certainly from the public sphere. Nowadays, post-secular tendencies are clearly visible in the societies belonging to the western civilization, and science constitutes an important field of their impact – something that the present article has been concerned with. For researchers of the positivist persuasion, such interference is unacceptable; however, as it is well-known, there are other models of practicing science, and the one originating with positivism is not the only and indisputable one. This problem seems worth considering from a different angle, namely, by considering how much could science gain by way of reference to faith, transcendence and theological reflections, and what new areas it could open itself to and how much more it could say about man – especially when it comes to the humanities. Therefore, I have covered the post-secular references in the natural sciences and sociology. The examples provided point to the vital presence of such references and their invigorating influence on the subject matter as well as the methodology of the research.

While speaking of the present post-secular turn, including that occurring within science, one may compare it to the idea of the New Middle Ages of Nicolai Bierdiajew, who described the era of civilizational decline and the subsequent era of spiritual development in the form of the New Middle Age. It is also the scientific cognition that would be renewed, new cognitive categories would sprout, and science would become closer to religion, just as all other forms of human activity: “Understanding, morality, the arts, the State, the economy, should become religious, but of their own accord and from within, and not through compulsion from without.”⁵⁰ The dawn of an age which would assign a higher importance to spiritual values was also written about by Pitrim A. Sorokin – one of the chief sociologists of the twentieth century. Describing the symptoms of the then present crisis, he would also point to the means of breaking out of it. At the end it seems worthy to quote his words on the status of science and its relationships with the other forms of human activity. They present a unitary conception of human action in the spheres of morality, art and science, while they also relate them to the transcendent reality: “From the integralist standpoint, the present antagonism between science, religion, philosophy, ethics and

⁵⁰ M. Bierdiajew, *Nowe Średniowiecze*, Komorów 1997, p. 129.

art is unnecessary, not to mention disastrous. In the light of an adequate theory of true reality and value, they all are one and all serve one purpose: the unfolding of the Absolute in the relative empirical world, to the greater nobility of Man and to the greater glory of God. As such they should and can cooperate in the fulfilment of this greatest task.”⁵¹

⁵¹ P.A. Sorokin, *Kryzys naszych czasów*, “Pressje” 20/2010, p. 34.

