The Russian Postsecular[1]

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Introduction

The place of religion in public sphere and the validity of religious arguments under conditions of political modernity are important topics in political philosophy. Comprehensive visions of the "good life" endorsed by religious traditions are almost always bound to clash with the modern, thin, secular and procedural conceptions of what holds a pluralistic political community together. Orthodox Christianity, as any other religious tradition, has been challenged to define its relationship with political modernity.[2] For the most part of modern history, the work of definition of the religious-secular relationship has been conceptualized as a one-way street: it was the religious traditions that had to come to terms with secularization as a social process, and with secularism as increasingly predominant worldview. In the twentieth century, this has meant downright repression for the churches in communist Eastern Europe, but even in the Western world, religious traditions could either reject the secular world all together, in which case the secular side considered them "fundamentalist," or they could try to arrange themselves with the secular order, in which case they were considered as "modernizing."[3]

Whichever road they chose, it remained a unilateral move; it was all about religion coming to terms with political modernity. In recent years, however, this one-way street model of the religious-secular relation has lost persuasiveness, and has given way to a model that sees the relationship between political modernity and religion in a more reciprocal way. Two factors have been decisive for this shift. First, there is the sociological observation that religions continue to occupy an important role in the modern world, despite all predictions of their imminent decline.[4] Second, we can observe a philosophical and conceptual shift, which disputes the normative validity and democratic legitimacy of secularism as the quintessence of modern politics.[5] As a consequence, today's debates over the secular-religious relationship have lost the character of a one-way street and start to resemble a two-way road; it is the secular and the religious side defining with and *vis-à-vis*

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[1] This chapter has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (POSEC, ERC-STG-2015-676804).

[2] Stoeckl et al., *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity*.

[3] Stoeckl, "*Political Theologies and Modernity*."

[4] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*; Berger, *Desecularization of the World*.

[5] Poignantly expressed in the title of Veit Bader's book, *Secularism or Democracy*?

each other the terms of their coexistence. The term that catches both the sociological and normative novelty of this moment is *postsecularity*.

Arguably, Orthodox Christianity is being challenged by postsecularity more profoundly than Western Churches: sociologically, because after the fall of communism, Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe are experiencing a resurgence, whereas Western Churches have had continuity; and normatively, because in the context of political transition, matters like state-church relations, largely settled in the West, are open to discussion and new institutionalization.

In this chapter, we examine how *postsecularity* is engaged both as an empirical condition and as a philosophical concept in the Orthodox context. Our focus lies on Russian Orthodoxy, because Russian Orthodox theologians and philosophers have been active in discussing postsecularity, and have created a new and original "Russian postsecular." This Russian postsecular, we will demonstrate, is characterized by the desire to define a middle ground between anti-modernism and modernization, or—stick- ing to our road metaphor—to map a two-way road in a maze of one-way streets. However, the Russian postsecular is, as we show in the last section of this chapter, not immune to ideological instrumentalization, and has been used to justify Russia's recent anti-liberal turn to "traditional values." This anti-liberal instrumentalization of postsecular theory is partly connected to the lack of normative reflections in Russian debates on postsecularity.

Postsecularity and Orthodox Theology

Postsecularity as a concept is rooted in empirical claims regarding the demise of the secularization thesis, and the widely shared agreement that modern societies are experiencing a "return of religion." Several Western sociologists have disputed the validity of this last claim, arguing that the world "is as furiously religious as it always was."[6] However, whether sociologists have taken a critical[7] or an affirmative stance on postsecularity as a new empirical reality,[8] contemporary scholars, philosophers and theologians tend to agree that something has changed in the way secular public discourse, academic political philosophy, and social theory approach religion. The epitomizing moment of this new relationship between secular philosophy and theology was the face to face discussion between the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and the future

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[6] Berger, *Desecularization of the World*.

[7] Turner, "Religion in a Post-Secular Society"; Gorski et al., *Post-Secular in Question*.

[8] Rosati and Stoeckl, Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies; Molendijk et al., *Exploring the Postsecular*; Rosati, Making of a Postsecular Society.

Pope Benedict, Cardinal Ratzinger, in 2004.[9] In the wake of this event, Christian theologians of different denominational backgrounds have started to discuss the place of religion in a political modernity that appears to be shedding off its anti-religious reflexes in terms of postsecularity.[10]

Orthodox theologians have made no exception to this trend. Contemporary Orthodox theologians have affirmed that we live in a post-secular age, from Pantelis Kalaitzidis in his summary of the proceedings of the international conference "Academic Theology in a Post-Secular Age"[11] and Davor Dzalto in "Religion and Realism,"[12] to Sergej Horujy[13] and Alexander Kyrlezhev, about whom we will write in detail below. Even church leaders use the term freely in their speeches—for example, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew[14] or Patriarch of Moscow Kirill.[15] But what does this reference to postsecularity actually entail from an Orthodox theological perspective? What do Orthodox thinkers mean when they use this term? In this chapter, we look into the Russian debate for an exemplary answer to these questions. However, before we turn to the Russian texts, let us clarify what postsecularity stands for.

What is Postsecularity?[16]

In Western academia, the most influential interpretation of postsecularity was given by the political liberal agenda formulated in particular by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas.[17] The Habermasian interpretation of postsecularity holds that an ideology of secularism is not an integral part of liberalism, and that liberalism should instead be qualified by "reflexive" forms of secularism.[18] Secularism as a political ideology, the argument goes, discriminates against religious citizens. All citizens must in principle be free to enter into public debates from within the framework of their "comprehensive doctrines," provided that they are ready to deliberate over political norms in a reasonable fashion, and in the view of a consensus that can become

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[9] Habermas and Ratzinger, "Vorpolitische moralische Grundlagen."

[10] Reder and Schmidt, *Ein Bewußtsein*; Eggermeier, „Post-Secular Modernity?"; Yudin, „Dialektika postsekuliarizatsii."

[11] Kalaïtzidis, "Orthodox Theology."

[12] Dzalto, *Religion and Realism*.

[13] Horujy, "Postsekuliarizm i antropologiia"; "Anthropological Dimensions"; "Postsekuliarizm i situatsiia cheloveka."

[14] Bartholomew I, "Religions and Peace."

[15] Kirill, "Tserkovnaia zhizn'."

[16] For more on this, see Stoeckl and Uzlaner, "Four Genealogies of Postsecularity."

[17] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*; Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere."

[18] Calhoun et al., *Rethinking Secularism*; Ferrara et al., *Philosophy and Social Criticism*; Gorski et al., *Post-Secular in Question*.

valid for all (the "overlapping consensus"). Habermas himself describes this kind of reasoning as "post-metaphysical," because it affirms the validity of moral and political principles not by indication of some transcendental point of reference, but through an immanent deliberation process. The equality of public deliberation is threatened, however, when the secular public discourse renders it difficult for religious citizens to voice their arguments. Habermas responds to this particular problem with the assertion that not only should religious citizens be asked to trans- late their claims into the language of secular public discourse, but also the non-religious citizens are asked to play their part, namely, to scale down their secularist aspirations. Such a reciprocal work of translation should give rise to what he calls "the complementary learning process," Habermas's concepts of translation and of complementary learning are premised on the idea that religions undergo a process of modernization in response to the challenges of religious pluralism, modern science, and positive law and profane morality. This notion of "modernization of religious consciousness" has been accused of a secularist and ethnocentric bias by some commenta- tors, who see in it merely a softened version of the old one-way street model of religious-secular relationships, where religious traditions just react to secular developments and ideas.[19]

The Habermasian version of postsecularity can be said to be the most influential tradition of understanding postsecularity. Apart from Habermas's powerful interpretation, there exist alternative accounts of postsecularity. One can find examples of these alternative understandings of postsecularity in works of John Caputo, in particular his "On Religion" (2001), or in John Milbank's "Beyond Secular Reason" (1990) and the movement of "Radical Orthodoxy" that he initiated (1998). These non-Habermasian interpretations are different from each other,[20] but they basicaly agree with the double shift connected to the postsecular turn: the sociological shift in the sense that religions are increasing their social significance; and the philosophical shift in the sense of rethinking the modern antireligous bias and a new readiness to consider religious arguments seriously.

But there is a very important difference between the Habermasian and these alternative accounts of postsecularity: the non-Habermasian interpretations aim at a more direct critique and rethinking of modern secular reason. For Habermas, the postsecular is "a sociological predicate," it refers to "modern societies that have to reckon with the continuing existence of religious groups and the continuing relevance of the different religious traditions," as well as to "an altered self-understanding of the largely secularized societies."[21] But

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[19] Habermas, "Dialogue"; Leezenberg, "How Ethnocentric is the Postsecular?"; Ma- clure and Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*.

[20] It is important to note that Caputo and Milbank provide very different alternatives to Habermasian postsecularity: Caputo follows deconstruction, whereas Milbank relies on a theology of analogy and participation.

[21] Habermas and Mendieta, "Post-Secular World Society," 4.

this, in Habermas's view, is not "a genealogical predicate" as it has nothing to do with "the paths of a genealogy of modern thought." Reason still "remains secular even in a situation depicted as ‚postsecular.'"[22]

Habermas protests against blurring distinctions between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, the religous and the secular. According to him, the postsecular "altered self-understanding" does not imply the necessity to rethink or even question the basic foundations of modern secularity. Habermas, in short, offers a very balanced vision of postsecularity. On the one hand, he recognizes the fact that religion is not a "configuration of the past," and that religious traditions should be fruitfully engaged with; but on the other hand, Habermas wants to leave the modern foundations of the distinction between the religious and the secular intact.

The non-Habermasian interpretations of postsecularity, by contrast, go right to the foundations of modern secular reason. They interpret postsecularity as an important turning point in the genealogy of modern thought. Postsecularity, in this view, becomes a constitutive element of a postmodern turn, which marks a rethinking of key tenets of modernity, the rejection of religion being the most important of them.[23] Rethinking the key tenets of secular modernity implies reconsideration of the very distinctions that Habermas would prefer to leave intact—between faith and reason, the religious and the secular, philosophy and theology.

The blurring of the boundary between theology and philosophy leads to the emergence of new, we could say "hybrid" forms of theological-philosophical reflection. Philosophers look to religion as "a key 'site of resistance' against the alienations of what is perceived as a singularly Western modernity."[24] Some observers even call this trend "contamination of philosophy with theological thinking," or "theologisation of philosophy."[25]At a moment in time when secular philosophy reflects upon its secularist bias and opens itself towards religion, theology also reacts to this turn, and perceives it as a chance to re-enter into philosophy and social theory on its own grounds.[26] The postsecular turn is perceived as a kind of eman- cipatory moment for Christian theology, which is now free to speak with its own language, without constantly looking back at secular epistemology and ontology.[27] Radical Orthodoxy, as proposed by John Milbank and his colleagues, is a good example of this kind of postsecular theology.[28]

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[22] Habermas and Mendieta, "Post-Secular World Society," 3.

[23] Caputo, *On Religion*, 37.

[24] Žižek and Milbank, *Monstrosity of Christ*, 255–56.

[25] Whistler and Smith, *After the Postsecular*, 2.

[26] Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy.*

[27] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy.*

[28] For example, Pabst, *Metaphysics*; Milbank and Pabst, *Politics of Virtue*.

The postmodern dimension of postsecularity is closely connected to genealogical studies about the modern construction of "religion," the "secular," and the "religious-secular binary." These studies show that the perception of modern religion and the modern secular as two incompatible dimensions is contingent, i.e., a construct resulting from theoretical and political efforts dating back at least to the fifteenth century.[29] Postsecularity becomes, in this genealogy of argumentation, the study of religion and society after the rejection of the strong assumptions of the secularization thesis, and after the deconstruction of conceptualizations of religion in the Western social sciences.

We need to stress that the field of theological-philosophical post- secularity is far from unanimous—this is a pluralistic, burgeoning conflict field ranging from Milbank's "Radical Orthodoxy"[30] to Caputo's spiritual deconstruction,[31] to Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion's theological turn in phenomenology,[32] to Žižek's "theology of the death of God."[33]

Most non-Habermasian interpretations of postsecularity consider postsecularity not merely as a rethinking of the antireligious bias of modern secular thought, but as reconsideration of secular reason itself, to the point of considering the possibility of going beyond secular modernity to some alternative versions of it. Such a "strong" version of postsecularity, which implies not just an adjustment of directions (from one-way to two-way) inside the fixed structure of the religious-secular divide, but a more radical rethinking of not just the directions of influence, but of the very foundations of this structure, is attractive from an Orthodox, convention- ally modernity-critical perspective. Little wonder, therefore, that it is this non-Habermasian version of postsecularity that was appropriated and developed in the Russian philosophical and theological context.

Orthodox theologians question the fact that liberal secular modernity is something that must be taken for granted, and that postsecularity is what happens inside this configuration. There is a strong temptation to go beyond modernity and secularity, at least in the sphere of philosophical and theological reflection. For this reason, the Russian debate on postsecularity has remained peculiarly non-Habermasian; in fact, the postsecular theory offered by Habermas finds only very limited reception and support,[34] and the initial Russian debates on postsecular society were almost completely devoid of any references to Habermas.

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[29] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*; Nongbri, *Before Religion*; Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*; Fitzgerald, Discourse on Civility and Barbarity.

[30] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory.*

[31] Caputo and Vattimo, *After the Death of God*.

[32] Staudigl and Alvis, "Phenomenology and the Post-Secular Turn."

[33] Žižek and Milbank, *Monstrosity of Christ*, 110–233.

[34] Uzlaner, "Dialog nauki i religii."

The Russian Postsecular

The first scholarly article to introduce the term "postsecular" into Russian in a systematic way was "A Postsecular Age" by Alexander Kyrlezhev, published in 2004.[35] It took another couple of years before the term gained wider prominence and a more systematic reception set in, mostly with the works of Dmitry Uzlaner,[36] Kyrlezhev[37] and few others.[38] The authors, who actively introduced the term into the Russian language were theologians, philosophers, and sociologists of religion. The prevailing use was that of postsecular as an adjective (*postsekuliarnyi*), such as in "postsecular society," "postsecular world," or "postsecular philosophy," but also postsecularism (*postsekuliarizm*) and postsecularity (*postsekuliarnost'*) was used. The popularity of postsecularity as a theory and concept among Russian Ortho- dox scholars rested on two factors: First of all, theological and philosophical debates on religion, secularism, modernity and politics were, just like almost all other philosophical trends in the West, new food for thought in a post-Soviet context that had been cut off from the Western humanities for decades. Postsecularity, intellectually, was the topic to study. Secondly, the term postsecularity had an immediate sociological appeal in twenty-first-century Russia, characterized by religious revival and a renewed public role of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In order to illustrate the way postsecularity has been conceptualized in Russia, we are going to consider the ideas of Alexander Kyrlezhev (b. 1957), a contemporary Orthodox theologian and philosopher, who, as we mentioned above, initiated discussions on postsecularity in Russia, and offered his own original interpretation of this concept. This interpretation is non-Habermasian (but definitely not anti-Habermasian) in the sense that ideas of Habermas play a very small role in his conceptualization of postsecularity. The Habermasian postsecular is much more normative than descriptive, while the Russian interpretation turns out to be much more descriptive and less normative.

The Russian reception of postsecularity is not interested in Habermas's "postmetaphysical postsecularism," as Bengtson calls it.[39] Instead, it emphasizes the link between postsecularity and postmodernity. "The start of the postsecular age coincides with the start of the postmodern age," Kyrlezhev writes, because

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[35] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnaia epokha." See English version, Kyrlezhev, "Postsecular Age."

[36] Uzlaner, "V kakom smysle sovremennyi"; "Vvedenie v postsekuliarnuiu filosofiiu"; "Kartografiia postsekuliarnogo."

[37] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe"; "Postsekuliarnaia kontseptualizatsiia religii"; "Sekuliarizm i postsekuliarizm."

[38] Morozov, "Has the Postsecular Age Begun?"; Shishkov, "Osmyslenie poniatiia 'postsekuliarnoe'"; Horujy, "Postsekuliarizm i antropologiia"; Antonov, "'Secularization' and 'Post-Secular.'" Horujy and Antonov identify the Russian religious philosophy of the Silver Age as a prologue to present-day postsecularity.

[39] Bengtson, *Explorations in Post-Secular Metaphysics*.

"postmodernism gives freedom to religion, religiosity."[40] In many regards, Kyrlezhev's vision echoes the one of the the- ology of Radical Orthodoxy: "The theoretical foundations for the secular have been systematically dismantled. So if we are witnessing the advent of the postmodern . . . then we should also be seeing the advent of the *post*-secular. And insofar as twentieth-century Christian theology . . . al- lied itself with the Enlightenment project, resigning itself to an "apologetic" project of correlation with secular thought, the demise of modernity must also spell the demise of such theology."[41] It is little wonder that Alexander Kyrlezhev, together with other interpreters of postsecularity, was one of the key popularizers of Radical Orthodoxy's project in Russia.[42]

ostsecularity in this interpretation is first of all a *descriptive* concept. It describes the end of secularization, which in the Russian context refers to the end of the Soviet atheistic project, and the beginning of post-Soviet religious revival or desecularization. At the same time, postsecularity goes deeper and describes fundamental changes concerning the religious-sec- ular divide. The contemporary situation, according to Kyrlezhev, should be scrutinized against the background of paradigm changes, which he de- scribe as three consecutive shifts or stages: the religious, the secular, and the postsecular.[43] It is important to stress that Kyrlezhev does not intend this narrative to express a Hegelian triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The postsecular in his view is *not* a synthesis, which unites crucial elements of both the religious (thesis) and the secular (antithesis). Secondly, his is not a historicizing account, according to which at one time religion prevailed, which was then suppressed by the secular, only to be overtaken again by religion (as proponents of the de-secularization thesis would argue).

Kyrlezhev's original theory of postsecularity rests on the observation that all three stages (the religious, the secular, the postsecular) define in different ways the religious-secular divide; so the sequence can also be conceived of as a pre-modern religious-secular divide, a modern religious- secular divide, and, finally, a postmodern religious-secular divide. The key event in this series of shifts is the emergence of modern secularity. For this reason, the sequence could also be divided into the pre-secular, the secular, and the postsecular stages.

1. At the pre-secular (pre-modern or religious) stage, the world is thought of as God's creation. In this configuration, "everything secular is religious in the sense that it is thought of from inside the religious view of the world."[44] The secular here is just a pole of human existence that exists along the religious pole inside a world created by God. Historically, Kyrlezhev associates this configuration with the Middle Ages. In this

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[40] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnaia epokha."

[41] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 33.

[42] See Kyrlezhev, "Dzhon Milbank."

[43] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 100.

[44] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 100.

configuration it is not possible to differentiate between the religious and secular, as religion is everywhere, "here religion is diffusive—even though there still is, so to say, a proper sphere of religion (for example, liturgy)."[45]

2. A proper religious-secular divide emerges only at the second, modern or secular stage; this is the emergence of modern secularity. In this modern configuration "the secular is not a specific aspect of theory/ practice, it is not one of the poles of the world outlook, but a fun- damental, ontological characteristic of the world, which is revealed by "the light of natural reason." The secular, in this new meaning, emerged as a construct of human thought, which describes the cosmic (natural) and the social as existing independently from the religious pole. From now on Nature (the natural) is not a distorted, but intrinsi- cally good Creation of God, but a neutral givenness of the world, self- sufficient, and for that reason an ultimate reality with which human being and humanity in general are in contact."[46] Modern secularity emerges when the universe and society are conceptualized as natural, as existing without any reference to God or to something transcendental. This natural universe and society could be cognized without any references to transcendent sources, be it faith or revelation. The light of natural reason is enough to get all necessary theoretical and pragmatic knowledge about this secular order. This could be called a secular epistemology alongside a secular ontology.

In this secular configuration, religion turns into "that-which- enchants," and consequently must be "disenchanted."[47] In that sense, "it is important that the sociocultural whole is secular in its essence, whereas the religious is just a specific zone (along with art, ethics, law, economics, state, sport etc.). In other words, we are witnessing an immanentization of the religious, as all its claims to transcendence, to exit (theoretical and practical) beyond the boundaries of natural givenness to an other-worldly foundation of the natural world contra- dict the new basic vision that it is Nature, this-worldy by definition, that is the ultimate reality." In this new secular age, some place is still left for religion. But from now on this is a "sphere of the subjective and personal, a space of individual worldviews and corresponding psychology."[48]

3. The third, postmodern or postsecular stage sets in with a critique of secularism. Kyrlezhev writes: "The postsecular age starts at the moment when the true nature of secular knowledge as quasireligious is revealed; when it becomes clear that the universalist ambitions of secularism are in no way different from the universalist ambitions of religion." Kyrlezhev echoes postmodern theoreticians when he writes: "The scientific, objective Reason of Modernity—in its ultimate foun- dations—is a myth and nothing more."[49]

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[45] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnaia kontseptualizatsiia religii," 56.

[46] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 101.

[47] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 102.

[48] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 103.

[49] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 106.

Postsecularity shares with postmodern theory the fact that it is, in its first impulse, critical or negative: "The first and basic definition of the postsecular age is principally negative. This is a situation that reveals itself after the historical negation of the axiomaticity and firmness of basic meanings, ambitions and zeal of the modern secular paradigm. We are witnessing the death of the secular God, we are witnessing the secularization of secularism."[50] As a result, Kyrlezhev argues, the world is entering situation of "principle undecidedness concerning the eternal, ultimate and absolute foundation of the world which was established by the secular paradigm (of disenchantment)."[51]

To summarize, with postsecularity, the world is entering a post- secular *and* a postreligious stage, in the sense of moving beyond both the pre-modern and the modern religious-secular configuration. Kyr- lezhev offers several examples of such post-religious and post-secular configurations: "spirituality," in the sense of forms of belief that mix various bits and pieces of traditional and new age religion and secular reason; and "Orthodox atheism," a form of belief in Orthodoxy as a cultural tradition without faith. Both are examples of people uniting irreconcilable elements—religious and secular—under one iden- tity. All this gives us the basic definition of postsecularity according to Kyrlezhev: "Postsecularity is a (new) uncertainty concerning the religious-secular configuration."[52]

At the end of this three-stage narrative, Kyrlezhev goes on to argue for a positive understanding of postsecularity, seeing it not just as a moment of critique, but also as a situation of creativity: "There is only one solution for this situation: the creation of a new concept or a new model of religion which, on the basis of the above mentioned, would be postsecular."[53]

Up until this point, Kyrlezhev's argument has closely followed the non-Habermasian line of reasoning about postsecularity that we described in the first section; in particular Milbank's, "Beyond Secular Reason," but also Charles Taylor's "A Secular Age." Likewise, his scheme of the religious- secular-postsecular reminds of Caputo's "On Religion." Eventually, how- ever, Kyrlezhev's attempt to develop not only a critical, but also a positive formulation of postsecularity goes beyond these sources. He sharply dif- fers from Taylor's liberal communitarianism inasmuch as he rejects the Western religious-secular configuration as viable; but he also differs from reactionary antimodernism inasmuch as he criticizes any attempt to "recreate pre-modern religion."[54]

Kyrlezhev develops the normative dimension of his theory in the light of the post-Soviet experience. Soviet communism was for him a radical ver- sion of the secular configuration, which introduced a self-sufficient

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[50] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 106.

[51] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 105.

[52] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnoe," 101.

[53] Kyrlezhev, "Postsekuliarnaia kontseptualizatsiia religii," 57.

[54] Kyrlezhev, "Sekuliarizm i postsekuliarizm," 173.

natural and social order, and considered religion obsolete. The failure of the Soviet project is interpreted by Kyrlezhev as the failure of modern secularism as such. Soviet communism has come to an end, and in a similar vein the age of secularization, from a Russian Orthodox perspective, has also come to an end. Western secularism—even though it unfolded in much less violently anti-religious ways than Soviet atheism—is seen as equally outdated and in need of reconsideration. At the same time, Kyrlezhev resists any attempt to glorify the religious past, or to embrace an all-saving Orthodox "tradition" that should reasserts itself in twenty-first-century Russia. Instead, he speaks of a "postsecular model of religion," by which he means a religious stance of engagement with the world that overcomes, on the one side, the pre-secular desire to give shape to the world as such, and, on the other side, the anti-secular desire to fight the world.

Kyrlezhev's interpretation of postsecularity as a kind of "third way" actually echoes the sociologist Kim Knott, who also speaks of the advent of a "third camp" in the field formerly defined by the binary between secu- lar versus religion.[55] However, Kyrlezhev remains rather vague as to how exactly we should imagine this "postsecular model of religion." This vague- ness, this lack of an elaborate normative vision—which is the strongest side of the Habermasian approach—is becoming a real theoretical and practical challenge to the Russian interpretation of postsecularity. This is especially true in the light of recent attempts to instrumentalize the theory of post- secular for the sake of particular ideological projects—a phenomenon we turn to in the next section.

Instrumentalization of Postsecularity and its Criticism

The concept of postsecularity emerged in the context of the academic study of the contemporary religious situation. In this sense, the Russian interpre- tation of postsecularity must be placed in one context with similar efforts by scholars in the West. It is, first of all, a value-free description of what is going on with religion in the twenty-first century. However, concepts travel beyond academic debates, and descriptions can turn in the eyes of some interpreters into prescriptions. Postsecularity is not an exception to this; in fact, it has acquired a popularity and political significance that few other philosophical terms presently enjoy.

In the Russian context, vague appeals to postsecularity have become an important argument in favor of strengthening relations between tradi- tional religious organizations and Russian state institutions. Any criticism of this rapprochement is interpreted as attempt to hold on to outdated forms of secularism, which are untenable in the new postsecular context. The postsecular criticism of secular ontology and epistemology is also used as argument in the context of debates about the place of religion in the Rus- sian educational system, for example theology in universities and lessons of religion in schools. Important church leaders such as Metropolitan Hi- larion have referred to postsecular society in order to justify the inclusion of

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[55] Knott, "Cutting through the Postsecular City."

religious subjects into public school curricula.[56] Patriarch Kirill refers to the postsecular in the sense of a "new postsecular age," which means that "rigid and aggressive secularism is losing dominant positions in social and cultural life";[57] and Alexander Shipkov, the vice-chair of the Russian Orthodox Church's Synodal Department of Relations between the Church and Society and Mass Media, supported his ideas about the necessity of increasing the presence of the Orthodox Church in the life of the Russian state with reference to postsecularity.[58] To a certain extent, one can say that speaking about the postsecular has become part of official rhetoric of the Russian Orthodox Church.

It is little wonder that in this context postsecular theory faces harsh criticism from those who do not welcome Russian "desecularization from above."[59] As one author claimed: "a theologically informed vision about the coming of a postsecular age is based on unjustified sociological data: the postsecular world turns out to be a dream of a small group of believers, who aspire to hasten the time of spiritual revival."[60] Opponents criticize the theory of postsecularity as an ideological tool, which shakes the very weak foundations of the Russian secular state. In the logic of this criticism, the postsecular genealogical, philosophical and theological deconstruction of secularism does not lead to anything new. Instead of bringing greater democratic equality, or new legitimacy, it results or can result in destruc- tion of important achievements of secular modernity—science, secular state, "civilized" religion, liberalism. Postsecular theory, the critics warn, is just a strategy for reinstalling a pre-secular order.

This dynamic of conflict leaves us, as scholars engaged in the elaboration of postsecular theory, with more questions than answers. As an analytical concept, postsecularity meant that scholars should look impartially at the social significance of religion, to the point of rethinking the very configuration of the religious-secular divide. It implied the search for new forms and models of the secular-religious relation that would not repeat the old ones. Postsecularity is interpreted by most theorists, from Habermas to Caputo to Kyrlezhev, as an opportunity for change, creativity and comprehensive learning. But the reality of most Russian Orthodox debates about postsecular society, which turn the theoretical concept into an ideological weapon, clearly shows that the novel term can easily be used to justify old and very well-known binaries. The postsecular research field is a site of conflict.

Kyrlezhev is well aware about the danger of such an instrumentalization. He admits that the novelty of the postsecular constellation is not really appreciated, nor positively exploited in the Russian Orthodox context. Referring to the possibility of a postsecular political theology, that is, a theology that positively and

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[56] Metropolitan Hilarion, "Theology in Contemporary Russian Academia"; Shmonin, "Toledo Principles."

[57] Kirill, "Teologiia v vuzakh."

[58] Shipkov, "My dolzhny vziat' vse luchshee."

[59] Karpov, "Social Dynamics of Russia's Desecularization."

[60] Quoted in Dannenberg, "Tupiki 'Postsekuliarnogo.'"

creatively reckons with secularization, he writes: “We are forced to assert that . . . the Orthodox ecclesial milieu, clergy and laity alike, rejects any *new* political theology as a theological reaction to historical and current developments.”[61] Kyrlezhev is aware that in his present Russian Orthodox context, where theological antimodernism prevails, postsecular theory is only too often interpreted “as a foundation for religious revenge in the sociopolitical sphere,” and could “serve as an obstacle to the development of a political theology . . . responsive to the processes of secularization.”[62]

Conclusion

The concept of the postsecular and corresponding theories were intro- duced into the Russian context in order to make sense of the post-Soviet experience. Initially, this was a predominantly academic and sociological endeavor to address the end of Soviet secularization, and the increasing social significance of religion in the Russian context. Postsecularity provided a theory according to which Russia was facing not just a simple “religious revival,” or a return to pre-communist forms of religiosity and church-state relations, but a more profound reconfiguration of the religious-secular divide. The normative dimension of this theory implied the emergence of new creative spaces of postsecularity, where new forms of religion, of political theology, and of church-state relations would appear, and would allow to move beyond habitual pre-Soviet or Soviet forms. These forms would be postsecular and postreligious with regard to the outdated pre-modern and modern conceptualizations of religion and secular. In short, postsecu- lar theory contained a promise of religious flourishing. It also contained the promise of a flourishing of alternative worldviews and of pluralism in general, but this last point was willfully overlooked when the theoretical concept got appropriated by the official Orthodox discourse.

The concept of postsecularity was gladly taken on by Russian Ortho- dox Church representatives, who perceived the post-Soviet situation as un- fair to the increasing social significance of Orthodox Christianity in Russia. This led to an oversimplification of this concept, to the point that it has become a justificatory tool for just any expansion of the Church’s presence in Russian society. In the last five years, a series of measures have consider- ably expanded the power of Russian Orthodox Church and have marked Russia’s turn to “traditional values.”[63] As a consequence, antireligious and anticlerical sentiments among secular groups who perceive this expansion not as something new, but as a simple return to pre-Soviet forms, have also increased. In order to oppose Russia’s conservative turn the critics refer to arguments which more and more

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[61] Kyrlezhev, “On the Possibility or Impossibility,” 187 (italics added).

[62] Kyrlezhev, “On the Possibility or Impossibility,” 187.

[63] Stepanova, “Spiritual and Moral Foundations of Civilization”; Agadjanian, “Tra- dition, Morality, and Community”; Tsygankov, “Crafting the State-Civilization.”

remind of traditions of Soviet "scientific atheism." As a result, the Russian public sphere is divided between two incompatible camps—one hyper-religious, which argues for tradition and perceives any criticism of Church and Orthodoxy as intrigues of enemies of the Church and of the state, the other—hyper-secularist, which argues for science, progress, liberalism, secularism, and which perceives any conces- sion to religion as a betrayal of the fight for the future of civilized forms of life in Russia. Postsecularity as the theory that would unpack the modern secular-religious divide and create space and imagination for new forms of interaction, is just a faint echo in these debates. There is no longer any trace of the postsecular imperative, described hopefully by Horujy as "both conflicting sides, secular consciousness and religious consciousness, must stop their confrontation and go over to dialogue and partnership."[64]

So where to will the Russian postsecular lead? As a descriptive social theory, it provides a useful approach to the study of the very conflicts that spring up around it, but as a normative theory, the postsecular search for a middle ground between two extremes becomes more and more problem- atic, if not obsolete. It almost seems as if the fateful logic of Russian culture, which implies constant oscillation between two extremes, masterfully analyzed by Lotman and Uspenskij,[65] has once more triumphed over idealistic aspirations for some middle position that would bring both camps into "a complementary learning process."

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[64] Horujy, "Anthropological dimensions," 1.

[65] Lotman and Uspenskii, "Binary Models." See also Epstein, "Religiia posle ateizma [Religion after Atheism]," 159–221.

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