

C 47 1969 Sacralization and Secularization

Leonard Laeyendecker, "The Sociological Approach to Secularization"

p 10 'Social reality is man made' Cf P Berger and T Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality, New York: Doubleday, 1967.

p 11 'Our ways of thinking and acting, socially prescribed and experienced and maintained as meaningful, are related to every sphere of life. Their duration and power can be either limited or long-lasting and fundamental. In the latter case, they center mainly around the key aspects of man's life: birth, death, education, man's lot and man's destiny. In between there lies a multiplicity of degrees and nuances. We can also group institutions into institutional ~~XXXXXX~~ sectors: political, economic, religious, and family institutions, and so on.

'The process of institutionalization also includes legitimation understood as the explanation and justification of institutional activity. Here we can distinguish several levels. A beginning of this legitimizing process is found in the ~~xxx~~ system of linguistic objectification, at the level of: This is the way in which things are done. A ~~x~~ second level shows rudimentary theoretical statements in the form of proverbs, sayings, legends, and folklore. A third level might be that of more specialized sets of knowledge formulated in relation to institutional sectors. At the highest level we find those views or philosophies of life which embrace all human activity and have the widest scope. The history of society and that of individuals have a "meaningful" place within /12/ these legitimizing processes, particularly in connection with borderline situations.'

p 12 'This legitimizing process consists of cognitive and normative elements, ideas about what is and what ought to be.... These systems of legitimation also an existence, more or less independent of individuals. But they only have social value if and in so far as they are what Weber calls Träger (carriers) -- in other words, if insofar as they are actually embodied in the thought and activity of individuals. And this is only possible when these legitimizing systems have meaning for those concerned in their concrete situation in life. In plain words: a norm will be obeyed as long as it makes sense. When it becomes meaningless, it is abandoned and no longer has any sociological value.

'The systems of legitimation therefore presuppose people, groups, relationships, and processes. All this taken together is

called the social infrastructure by Berger and Luckmann, and in a ~~new~~ sense this functions at the same time as the structure of a systems credibility. This means that people keep such a system alive in their social relationships by maintaining its reality, its objectivity, in their mutual relations. This too takes place at various levels -- for instance, in a very simple way by continuing to act within the legitimized institutions or very formally, by adhering to official declarations in such matters. In this latter case those whose function it is to maintain the definition of /13/ reality as expressed in these systems play an important part. This function can in turn be officially recognized, and so a new element arises within the institutionalised and legitimized pattern.'

p 13 The Christian Definition of Reality

p 14 'If we take religion as a specific definition of reality and consider it here in the shape of Christianity, leaving aside for the moment its internal variations, we can say that in the past the Church has concentrated on keeping this specific definition of reality alive. She ~~has~~ has given a concrete expression to this definition through a complicated set of dogmatic ~~propositions~~ propositions, rules of behavior, forms of ritual and organizational structures which provided her members with a pattern of interpretation and orientation required for their personal life. This definition could remain alive as long as it was meaningful in practice and experience for the concrete situation within which they had to act. In other words, the Christian confession as a legitimizing system was very closely bound up with the social structures within which it was experienced as meaningful. On the one hand, the specific confession was carried and propped up by the social structures; on the other hand, it legitimized these same structures, and the emphasis was bound to fall on the stabilizing and sanctioning effect effect of this legitimation. Because -- and to the degree that -- this interpretation (cognitive and normative) referred to a supra-empirical, intangible, and model reality, the social reality was made to share in all this.

¶ 'As in the case of the original forms of institutionalism, any statements about the primordial, hardly articulate, supra-empirical legitimations can be only ~~speculative~~ speculative. The ~~speculative~~

most ancient, pre-historic indications already show a later phase of development: they point to preoccupation with death and man's destiny. On the basis of later and more data, Eliade concluded that "reality was closely connected for primitive man with a heavenly archetype." Viewed in this light, Jewish-Christian thought /15/ is on the one hand a continuation of this orientation and, on the other, a profound modification of it, because the biblical definition of reality rests on the idea of one, almighty, free, and creating God. We therefore do not know of man otherwise than already in possession of supra-empirical legitimations.'

p 15 'How, as a result of what, and under which conditions does the supra-empirical legitimation disappear?'

Here we can do no more than situate the factors which play a part in the process of change in the three key points of this dialectic complex -- namely, the social structures, the legitimizing systems themselves, and man in his actual condition. Changes in any of these points inevitably bring about changes in the other ones, though not necessarily at once. These processes of change interact upon each other, which makes it impossible to explain them by any single cause. It is not possible to proceed otherwise than by analytical distinctions.

Changes in social structures are more acute in one period than in another. They are usually described in global terms at the broadest level, and must therefore be given a more accurate concrete expression for every region and every age. These global terms which ultimately provide less insight than appears are, among other things, the development of the money economy, the development of trade, the breakdown of feudal ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ attitudes toward authority, industrialization, migration and urbanization, democratization of education, the increase of vertical social mobility, and the development /16/ of modern means of communication. All these are aspects of a process which can be described in still more general terms as the development of a highly differentiated society which destroys the unity of the social infrastructure. We are seeing the rise of social segmentation and a plurality of societies. This makes it impossible, and inevitably so, to maintain one particular definition of reality as the exclusive vehicle of salvation. People live in different social worlds, with quite distinct cognitive and normative orientations which

can be in conflict with each other or at least show up the relative character of each. Moreover the traditional definition of reality is becoming constantly less meaningful for an existential situation that has been fundamentally modified and as a result is losing its social value.'

p 16 'It looks very much as if the significance of changes in social structure for changes in the legitimizing systems (here: religion and specifically Christianity) has received little attention compared with the historical changes in our concepts.

... 'The development of the natural sciences leads to a diminution of the sphere of non-physical causes and to the autonomy of the natural processes.... The case of the human sciences is far more problematic because these sciences have direct implications for the manner in which we define man, and this makes the confrontation with the traditional Christian image of man inevitable and painful.'

p 17 The Present Situation and Prognosis

'The replies to the question how far the secularization process has advanced are more assertive than persuasive. The available data indeed show a diminishing ecclesiastical participation, but this is really secondary. What is more important is how far people's personal and social life is still defined in supra-empirical terms. In private life there are still so many ~~firm~~ firm convictions about a personal and caring God that to ~~to~~ speak about modern man as secularized is glib. It looks as though this process is far more advanced in social life, although it is far from completed....'

p 18 'In brief, there are no doubt many ~~in~~ indications of a secularization process which has advanced in various degrees within various sectors of society, but we have not yet reached the stage where accurate statements can be made.

p 19 'A fundamental issue is what far-reaching consequences the disappearance of supra-empirical legitimations will have for Christianity. In other words: How far is the traditional definition of reality a conditio sine qua non for a genuine Christian confession of faith? The sociologist cannot answer this question, although he may be forced ~~x~~ to ask it on the grounds of what has been said above.'