

The Secularization of History

Robert D. Knudsen

- A. A Twofold Meaning of Secularization
- B. History Deprived of It's Religious Meaning
- C. Breakdown of the Humanistic View of History
- D. History and Christian World View

Robert D. Knudsen,

1924년 California Oakland에서 출생, California대학에서 학 전공, 언어학 부전공(1941 - 44), Westminster신학교에서 Th.B.와 Th.M. 취득(1944 - 47), 뉴욕에 있는 Union신학교에서 수학, 화란의 자유대학에서 철학박사과정 이수, "Symbol and Myth in Contemporary Theology"라는 논문으로 Union신학교에서 S.T.M. 학위 취득, Rockmont대학에서 철학 및 사회학 강의, Westminster신학교에서 조직신학 강의, "The Idea of Transcendence in the Philosophy of Karl Jaspers"라는 논문으로 화란의 자유대학에서 Ph.D. 취득(1958), 그 이후 지금까지 Westminster신학교에서 기독교 변증학 교수로 활동, 현 Orthodox장로교회 위임목사, Philadelphia장로회 회원, 'Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation', 'Westminster Theological Journal'에 각각 편집자문과 편집인으로 활동, 다수의 글 기고, 칼빈철학 연구회 학술지인 'Philosophia Reformata'에 다수 논문 기고

한글초록

세속화에는 두 가지 의미가 있다. 하나는 어떤 것이 교회의 영역에서 비 교회적 영역으로 전이되는 것을, 다른 하나는 종교적 의미가 제거되고 내재화되는 것을 의미한다. 이 두 가지의 의미 사용이 모두 다 타당하지만 ‘역사의 세속화’에 있어서는 후자의 의미가 더 중요하다. 어거스틴같은 중세 사상계에서는 역사의미의 근원은 역사 바깥, 즉 초월에서 찾게 되었는데, 역사의 세속화 과정이 일어난 근세에 이르러서 사람들은 역사가 그것 자체 안에서만 의미를 가진다고 주장했다. 말하자면 역사에 종교적 의미가 제거되고 역사는 자율적인 것으로 생각하게 되었던 것이다. 헤겔은 역사를 ‘이성의 전개’로 보았다. 그리고 역사주의의 입장이나 진화론적 역사관도 이런 내재주의적 입장을 잘 대변한다.

성경에 따르면 역사는 그것이 이성의 구현체이기 때문에 의미있는 게 아니라 하나님에 의해 창조되었으므로 의미있다고 한다. 역사는 문화적 명령의 맥락에서 이해되어야 한다. 역사는 하나님의 창조와 섭리 속에서만 의미를 지니므로 그 속에서 사는 우리는 문화적 사명을 다하며 그리스도와 그의 나라를 위해 수고해야 한다.

A. A Twofold Meaning of Secularization

As one speaks of secularization, he may have two things in mind. One may legitimately speak of 'secularization' when something passes from the sphere of the church to a non-churchly sphere. Thus the transfer of property from ecclesiastical control has been called 'secularization'. Secularization, however, has a second meaning which for our purposes is more significant. One may speak legitimately of 'secularization' when something is thought to have been deprived of its religious significance so that it has its meaning 'immanently'. Thus one may speak of the 'secularization' of the biblical doctrine of creation when it no longer refers to God's bringing all things into being but of human 'creative' activity, as it is found, for instance, in cultural attainment. Both of those usages are legitimate; the latter, however, is more important to us as we look at the secularization of history. It gives us better insight into the secularization process as we find it today.

As I say, it is legitimate to speak of secularization in the first sense, of removing something from the ecclesiastical to a secular sphere. This, however, allows for the idea that the church is the source of religion. On this view, to take something out of the sphere of the church is to deprive it of its religious meaning. Perhaps the church is thought of as that which stands at the center of society, giving it its direction. Perhaps it is that which provides society with its relation to God. To speak of secularization in the

first sense allows for the idea that the meaning of life is found in a particular relationship, namely, in relationships to the church, which has as its special function communicating the divine and securing one's relationship to it.

If one speaks of secularization in the second sense, he is not limited in this way. He can allow for the idea that religion does not focus in the church but that it is broader. To say that religion is broader than the church is in no way to denigrate the church. The church has been given the task of preaching the Word of God, of administering the sacraments, and of exercising church discipline. It is very wrong to minimize the place of the church. Nevertheless, if we see that religion is broader than the church, we can see how it is possible to 'secularize' something in the first sense without 'secularizing' it in the second sense. Thus it is possible to remove something from ecclesiastical authority without depriving it of its religious meaning. Indeed, all of life is religion. Thus one should serve God wherever he is. He should serve God from his heart in every sphere of life in which he participates.

This broader and deeper meaning of religion is implied in the idea of calling presented by the great Reformer Martin Luther. Luther introduced the idea that every legitimate human activity should be regarded as a divine calling to perform lay activities. Luther revolutionized the idea of calling by teaching that one is called to other than churchly occupations. One is able to carry them out apart from the intermediation of the church.

B. History Deprived of It's Religious Meaning

In the history of the West, there was a time when culture was unified under the leadership of the church. All human activities focused in the church, which drew them together and showed them their true purpose. In the Middle Ages, societies and guilds operated under the protection of a saint, whose image appeared prominently on their buildings. Life in general was thought to be surrounded by attending, sanctifying presences. In a city the towers of a great church would rise above the homes and shops, as a symbol of the guiding and protecting presence of God.

The above was the pattern for understanding history. History was thought to have its meaning in something beyond history. It related to an end($T\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$), which was the Kingdom of God mediated by the church.

It was the celebrated church father Augustine who set the stage for the Middle Ages. He promoted the idea that human life and thought found their meaning through God and his revelation. God is the Creator of all things. All things are under his providential care. History is understood in terms of its end, the Kingdom of God, which is represented on earth by his church. History is dominated by the antithesis between the City of God and the City of This World. The first is governed by a constitution that speaks

of love and engenders peace. The second is governed by a constitution that rejects God and his revelation and engenders division and strife. In history these two cities are not completely divided. There is some mixing of the good and the bad. Nevertheless, at the end, at the last judgment, there will be a final separation. The City of God will answer clearly to its end, according to its constitution, and the City of This World will fall into complete disorder in outer darkness. Augustine's view established the pattern for the Middle Ages. It said that all of life depended on God and his revelation, but it brought the church into the center as the representative of the City of God on earth.

With the movement that in the West is called Renaissance, attention shifted from heavenly, supernatural powers attending and supporting man to man himself and to the deployment of his natural powers. The focus was on human personality. This personality was supposed to be free and potentially infinite. All nature was a stage for the expression of its sovereign power. The idea was the well rounded personality, in which there was a maximum expression of human possibilities.

Thus man in his natural capacities, in his reason, came to stand at the center. Nature asserted itself in distinction from, or even in opposition to, grace. Reason asserted itself in distinction from revelation, or even in opposition to it.

In this atmosphere history did not come to its rights. Reason centered in human personality. Nature and history were a stage for

expressing its sovereign powers. Power over nature was sought by occult mans. More significantly it was sought by way of the developing mathematical sciences. As reason become associated with mathematical sciences history took a second place. Its meaning was found in relating to norms that themselves were non-historical. Now in a new sense the meaning of history was found outside of history. History could serve only to illustrate eternal truths that were themselves non-historical.

But it turned out that man could not find himself in this mathematically oriented thinking. In humanistic thought man had to be identical with himself in his act. Every human act had to reflect the self in its sovereignty and autonomy. Correspondingly, the self had to see itself reflected in everything it did. But man found that in this new way of thinking he had become a spectator of the forces molding his own existence. The kind of crisis has occurred again and again in Western thought. Here it was especially acute. Thus there were many attempts to preserve human personality from the inroads of mathematically oriented science.

In reaction the idea was promulgated that there is reason in history. The source of meaning in history was no longer sought in well founded knowledge outside of history; history was said to have meaning in itself. History, it was said, is made by man. Man is able to understand history, because he is capable of understanding what he himself has made. In history man finds the mirror of himself in his own autonomy, What he is reflected in

what he made. Thus, in a new way of thinking centered in history, it was said that man could be identical with himself in his act

In this development there was a secularization process, in that history was no longer thought to center in the church. There was also secularization in that history was thought to have no religious meaning. It was thought to be autonomous, especially when reason was found in history itself. But taking one's starting point in reason is also a religious act. One cannot eliminate religion. Thus we must add something to our understanding of secularization. It cannot truly eliminate religion. It means that one takes his starting point immanently, and not in God and his revelation. This too is religious.

C. Breakdown of the Humanistic View of History

Finding reason in history was supposed again to allow man to be identical with himself in his act. In history one was supposed to find a mirror of himself. Finding reason in history was supposed to liberate it. Now history could be understood in terms of history and not in terms of something outside it.

But this new approach stumbled as soon as history began to show itself for what it is. Soon it became apparent that man could not easily find himself in history. He again became an observer of the forces molding his existence.

Basically, the historical act is a positive expression of power. There is free forming activity which introduces something new. If we think of history in its social implications, we can speak of a new style. Thus history is divided into epoch, each of which has its own character.

If history is viewed in itself, if it is placed too much at the center, history tends to become a multiplicity of historically qualified moments. This tendency came to expression in what is called 'historicism'.

Now, if reason was found in history, man would expect to find there a reflection of himself. In history he would expect to be identical with himself in his act. But if history has become a multiplicity of historically qualified moments, in which of these could man find himself? Because each is a positive expression of power, there would be no criterion by which to make a decision. Man would come to hover above the various historical moments, as an observer, without being able to settle down in any one of them.

Some sought to find a solution without abandoning historicism. They rejected the idea that there is any general criterion for history. Each historical epoch had to be understood on its own terms, in view of its unique spiritual center. An historical unit, a culture, could be understood however, by lowering oneself down into it, in order to understand it in its uniqueness. This method is called 'empathetic understanding'.

This method might appear to have come advantages. Should we not acknowledge that there are many different cultural expressions? Should we not try to avoid reducing to the other? Indeed, there is a variety of cultures, and each has its own identity. But if one places history at the center, one no longer has the possibility of judging among cultures. Further, the idea of universal history is undermined.

We find an illustration of this situation in the theory of evolution. Employing a biotic analogy, men thought of history as a great organic process of development. Understood thus, evolution was thought of in universal terms. It embraced everything. It became a universal principle of interpretation. But as what is typical of history began to show through, the idea of a universal process of development came into question. Some continues to think of evolution in nature as a process of development, but they no longer thought this way in regard to culture. Historicism was too strong to allow this. Each cultures had to be viewed on its own terms. There was no universal process tying the various cultures together. Thus some accepted natural evolution while denying that there is an evolution of the human spirit.

Western thought has recognized historicism as a major problem. The major existential thinkers(Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre) all wrestled with this problem. It was typical of their approach, however, that they sought to provide an answer to historicism while leaving it intact. They did not challenge historicism at its

root. Thus they all developed what is called a 'dialectical' position.

Currently there is a movement, 'post-modernism', that has been challenging the supremacy of reason and the universality connected with it. It denies the possibility of obtaining a universal standard. It promotes pluralism. It questions the possibility of obtaining an idea of man and of the self to act as a guide. It has been accused of historicism. Yet, other than some historicism, it does not see the self reflected in history. One might say that in it the crisis of historicism has become even more acute.

Seen from this angle, post-modernism seems to be a step backward. The major existential thinkers saw the crisis of historicism and tried, be it unsuccessfully, to overcome it. Post-modernism appears to accent the problems while remaining skeptical about any solution.

This attitude will not prevail. Humanism will always be faced with the problem of the self, and how the human self can come to itself. It must always seek the place where the self is identical with itself in its act. Post-modernism will devour itself in its skepticism. It will not be able to suppress the questions concerning the self and history.

D. History and Christian World View

In a biblical view, man is not autonomous. He is not the

embodiment of reason, if by that is meant a concentration of human powers apart from the revelation of God. In fact, Man can know himself only in the light of God's revelation.

The church father Augustine taught that God created both time and history. History has meaning not because it is the embodiment of reason, but because it is created. It must be understood, therefore, within the framework of the order that God has created.

History must be understood in the context of the 'culture mandate'. God created man in his own image. Man was placed at the head of creation, as God's vicegerent. He was to serve God. He was to love God with all his heart, soul, and mind. He was to love his neighbor as himself. God gave the 'culture mandate' to man as his vicegerent. He commanded man to fill the earth and to subdue it. History is properly understood in the context of this command. In love to God and to his neighbor man is told to open up the potentialities of the created cosmos.

Because it is a response to the cultural mandate, history may never be placed at the center. It must be understood in terms of the context in which it has its meaning. It does not have meaning because it is the embodiment of reason. It has meaning because it functions within the creation and is a showcase of God's providential care.

Some Christians will be called to be leaders in the state, in the church, in education, in business, etc. They should seek to honor God as they help to fulfill the cultural mandate, as they contribute

to opening up the potentialities of the cosmos. Most Christians will not occupy places of leadership. They, however, should be careful to serve God wherever he has placed them. They should serve God by being good husbands, wives, faithful church-goers, etc. Leaders will also be judged as to whether they carry out even the humblest tasks to the glory of God.

Finally, history will culminate in the last judgment, when there will be a final separation of The City of God from the City of This World, as Augustine taught. When the Lord comes, will he find us watching? We must continue to work for Christ and his Kingdom, for the night is coming when no one can work.