



Dmitry Uzlaner. 2020. *Postsekuliarnyi povorot. Kak myslit' o religii v XXI veke* [The Postsecular Turn. How to Think about Religion in the Twenty-First Century]. M.: Izdatel'stvo Instituta Gaiidara (in Russian). — 416 p.

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Researchers who work in the humanities or the social sciences regularly present concepts to describe the current state of society with varying degrees of generalization and attention to a specific sphere of life (the economy, culture, religion). For example, until the beginning of the twenty-first century, postmodernism seemed to be the most relevant language for describing “modernity,” but recently numerous alternative concepts for describing the present have appeared and can be listed ad infinitum—hypermodernism, metamodernism, digimodernism, and so forth.

Many observers follow the influence of individual phenomena on modernity—the media, robotization, or, for example, religion. While scholars have long argued that we live in a secularized world,

having realized the inadequacy of this approach and noting both the transformation of the religious and religion’s return to society, researchers have begun to consider the need to invent a new language to describe new phenomena and trends. Accordingly, the concept of the postsecular was proposed and in recent decades has become increasingly popular.

The book by the sociologist of religion and philosopher Dmitry Uzlaner, *The Postsecular Turn. How to Think about Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, serves as a large-scale attempt to describe the ongoing changes in the transformation of the religious. The work offers an analysis of postsecularity, first, as an actual social reality, and second, as a relevant conceptual framework for describing this reality. In fact, this work is a continuation of the

monograph *The End of Religion? A History of the Theory of Secularization* (2019). The author's first book provided a comprehensive analysis of the sociological theory of secularization and its history within the Western context and in Soviet reality. The work ends by leading readers to the topic presented in the book reviewed here: the author now explores the reasons that the theory of secularization at the beginning of the twenty-first century began to lose its value as a system of representation and as a language for describing modernity, since the "post-secular turn" had taken place.

This turn occurred in the 1990s, when the concept of postsecularity emerged. As new religious phenomena arising in the second half of the twentieth century spread everywhere, the sense developed that the old model of describing reality no longer worked. In academic and sociopolitical literature devoted to the critique of secularism the concept of the "postsecular" began to see active use. Prior to this, new forms of religiosity were considered deviations from the norm and were viewed through the customary secular lens. Dmitry Uzlaner focuses his research on analyzing these trends.

What does the author mean by the postsecular turn and postsecularity? The postsecular turn is "the erosion of habitual religious and secular forms, on the one hand, and of the model of their representation

in academic discourse, on the other hand" (12). This disintegration necessitates the search for a new language to describe the nascent reality, simultaneously postsecular and post-religious, if one is to consider it with the help of "the usual ideas about religion and the secular" (12). Accordingly, postsecularity is a new unstable state of society, in which religion returns to the social space and new forms of interaction between religion and secular reality arise. Furthermore, postsecularity implies the need for a new model to represent the emerging reality. The postsecular does not seek to return to pre-secular ways of thinking; on the contrary, it becomes the basis for the formation of a fundamentally new state of modernity (97). Following the sociologist Gregor McLennan, Uzlaner indicates that one should understand the prefix "post-" in postsecularity as something that is beyond the secular, not after and not anti-secular (186). When speaking of postsecularity, Uzlaner also mentions alternative approaches to the description of modernity. For example, he refers to the concept of desecularization and immediately points to its inadequacy: desecularization, in contrast to postsecularization, focuses attention on the "reversal of secularization," the return to pre-modernity, which inaccurately describes current trends (185).

The Postsecular Turn itself is a collection of ten articles and one

appendix (a review of the book *The Science of Religion and Its Post-modern Critics* by the historian of philosophy Alexei Appolonov, 2018). The works have been published in various academic journals since 2008: some of them were included in the book in an expanded version; others appear in Russian for the first time. In other words, readers have the results of sustained, meticulous scholarly work, finally collected under one cover. The texts are arranged in chronological order of their publication, so readers should not expect a sequential narrative. Nevertheless, each article deals with a separate aspect of postsecularity and stands as a self-contained study, the conclusions of which represent an important contribution to social theory (the theory of postsecularity) which scholars can develop in further research and which contribute to other spheres of the humanities and social sciences. Due to the great empirical and theoretical richness of each chapter, any part of the book could be the subject of a thorough analysis; however, I shall focus on only those aspects I found most interesting.

Chapters One and Two were published in 2008 and 2011 in the journal *Logos* and provide a retrospective analysis of the concepts of the “religious” and the “secular” and their formation within the academy. Specifically, in these parts of the book the author draws at-

tention to the role of modernism in the construction of these categories and its gradual weakening in recent years: “religions today are trying to break free from the shackles of ‘religion’” (41), to return to their original status. Uzlaner does not believe that modernism has completely exhausted itself: ideological modernism is indeed “very much in question,” while institutional modernism is consolidating its position (41–2).

In the context of the new reality, philosophy itself is changing as a branch of thought: philosophy and theology are interpenetrating each other, which is becoming a growing trend and a distinctive characteristic of postsecular philosophy. This phenomenon even has a name—the theological turn (54). Many scholars have begun to oppose the intermixing of the two disciplines, but Uzlaner readily supports a second camp, whose representatives (for example, left-wing philosophers Alain Badiou, Terry Eagleton, Slavoj Žižek, and Giorgio Agamben) began to employ theological ideas and concepts actively in their own works (48–61).

Uzlaner focuses on more than the transformation of philosophy and theology, however: Chapter Three analyzes the relationship between religion and modernity in the social sciences. This chapter, like its predecessors, demonstrates how the theory of secularization has become an inadequate tool for describing

the changes underway. Here, the author identifies the following factors that prompted the consideration of secularization theory's loss of relevance: debates about European and American exceptionalism; a series of important world events, in particular the Iranian Revolution of 1979; and, finally, criticism of modernization theory, with which secularization has always been associated. According to Uzlaner, the sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt's concept of "multiple modernities" has become a possible lens for addressing the challenges faced by religious researchers (117–27).

Three chapters (Four, Eight, and Nine) speak directly to the Russian context of postsecularity. In Chapter Four, Uzlaner briefly leaves theory and directs his attention to a specific "case," the Pussy Riot case, and focuses on the characteristics of postsecularity in Russia. The value of the chapter lies in its examination of the boundary between the religious and the secular through the example of a punk prayer, which provoked a conflict of interpretations, confirming the instability of the postsecular situation. The author considers several aspects linked directly to the interpretive conflict: the very act of a punk prayer service, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior as an example of a profane "sacred" space, and the social group of "Orthodox believers" whose feelings the performance offended. For example,

the study views the punk prayer from the perspectives of several parties: members of the group Pussy Riot, official representatives of the Church, the general public, and "schismatics" (Christians opposed to both the Russian Orthodox Church and the current political regime) (132–45). Each party had its own understanding of the boundaries of the religious and the secular, which enabled the author to distinguish two normative visions of postsecularism in Russia: the "oppositional" and the "pro-authority" (177). The same case describes how, in the postsecular reality, the secular state and its agents are drawn into "(quasi-)theological disputes" (133). In addition, as shown in Chapter Nine, in which the author analyzes the nationwide pro-Orthodox consensus, the Pussy Riot case became a turning point in this consensus and hastened its gradual disintegration, which today is reflected in a more acute form, namely, the emergence of national conflicts based on religious grounds (299–346).

Chapter Four is also important because it introduces the author's concept of a "postsecular hybrid." By postsecular hybrids, Uzlaner means "the interpenetration of religion and societal subsystems from which it had once been isolated" (161). The Pussy Riot case made it possible to discern several striking Russian "postsecular hybrids": religion as part of the public order, the

intersection of the religious and political spheres, and confessionally sympathetic expert witnesses (162).

Chapter Eight examines how Russian theologians try to conceptualize postsecularity in Russia. As the authors indicate (the text is co-authored with sociologist Kristina Stoeckl), this conceptual framework was introduced into the Russian context to describe the post-Soviet experience. Proponents of this concept aim to find “a middle ground between the modern and the anti-modern” (271). The authors pay special attention to an analysis of the works of Alexander Kyrlezhev, who authored the first Russian-language systematic analysis of the postsecular.

Chapter Five begins a different conceptual block: the mapping of the postsecular, or cognitive mapping, to use the terminology of Fredric Jameson, one of the main theorists of postmodernism. The chapter describes the “key conceptual points” of the postsecular: postsecularity is considered as a new empirical reality, a new normative paradigm, and a new scholarly lens. This text in a sense represents the quintessence of the ideas expressed earlier, but the resulting cognitive map enables the reader to better understand the postsecular situation and to better navigate the issue.

Chapter Seven, which Kristina Stoeckl also co-authored, serves as an attempt to clarify and in a certain sense to map postsecularity.

The chapter examines four genealogies that give rise to a unique view of the postsecular: the sociological, the normative, the postmodern, and the theological. The researchers note that the large number of interpretations of the postsecular does not signify the concept’s inadequacy, but once again proves the fluidity of the modernity it seeks to capture and describe (249–67).

Chapter Six addresses the interaction of science and religion in the public sphere in the sense in which Habermas understood this “dialogue”—“the set of institutions and practices located between the sphere of state authority and the sphere of privacy” (212). The text defends religion as an important and inevitable participant in public discourse and shows that it cannot be an exclusively private phenomenon.

Finally, the last chapter, published in 2019, offers an overview of the main trends in the relations between religion and politics in the modern world. Here one learns that today not only can politics influence religion, but religion can also influence politics. A number of world events affected this, including the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the emergence of the “Christian right” movement in the United States. In another trend, many intellectuals refuse to take religious processes and religion itself seriously. Moreover, we are currently witnessing a crisis in secular political ideologies. The coupling of re-

ligion and politics in Western Europe and Russia constitutes a trend emblematic of this (347–67).

The idea that it is necessary, first, to conceive of modernity as postsecular, and, second, to accept postsecularity as a relevant lens for the analysis of modernity, runs as a common thread throughout the text. Uzlaner bases his reflections on a powerful empirical foundation: in the chapters devoted to the theoretical aspects of the analysis of postsecularity, the number of concepts and theories and their application to the phenomenon under study is pleasantly surprising (for example, John Rawls's concept of "overlapping consensus," John Caputo's approach to postsecular philosophy, and the analysis of the concept of secularity by Charles Taylor, Talal Asad, John Milbank, and others). In the chapters analyzing specific cases, the author performs a high-level analysis of media resources: for example, in his references to the Pussy Riot case, in addition to an accurate exposition of the materials of the case itself, one finds an examination of representative posts in amateur blogs (the "live journals" of the politician Alexei Navalny, Pussy Riot, and the journalist and politician Maxim Shevchenko) and in the national media (*Gazeta.ru*, *Radio Liberty*), as well as in thematic resources ("Orthodoxy and the World"). The author also turns to social media (the public pages

"MDK" and "Lepra" on VKontakte), for example, when analyzing contemporary, shared cultural values to prove the thesis about the collapse of the pro-Orthodox consensus. Although Uzlaner does not offer a detailed analysis of the content of social network pages, he outlines the general environment.

The work covers a wide range of topics, so the chronological arrangement of the materials is sometimes confusing: some of the ideas in the book recur but are presented from a new angle; yet one also finds repetitions that, admittedly, sometimes lack justification. In addition, there is a lack of narrative in the book that could make the rich material more coherent. This absence of narrative by no means negates the theoretical and empirical value of the work, however: in fact, it makes it possible for the book to delve more deeply into the context of the postsecular, and the ideas it offers can be used to develop the line of research already underway in sociology, religious studies, the philosophy of culture, and so on.

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