

**CHRISTIAN
APOLOGETICS II
2014 EC
GB**

March

2022

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Contemporary
Trends on the
Orthodox Faith
and/or Theology

Introduction

This part deals with contemporary challenges of faith, taking the cultural changes, philosophical trends, modern and post-modern ideas etc. with their theological implications.

Orthodox theology is consistent and unchangeable. But, the western cultures are experiencing different and new forms of modern & post-modern theologies, liberal theology and secularism with that of subjective judgments/subjectivism¹.

The **period** from Enlightenment² and the 18th century until today is called Modern Period. In this specific period, the consequences of Enlightenment are clearly seen. The **Enlightenment** includes/d a range of ideas centered on the **sovereignty of reason** and the **evidence of the senses** as the primary sources of knowledge and advanced ideals such as liberty, progress, tolerance, constitutional government and separation of church and state. "The period of the

¹ A philosophical thought or doctrine that says knowledge is merely subjective and that there is no external or objective truth. **Subjectivism** accords primacy to subjective experience as fundamental of all measure and law.

² The period of roughly 1650-1800 is known as the Enlightenment. Certain ideas and themes may be identified as characterizing this period in intellectual history. This include an emphasis on reason, and science in thinking through the great questions of human life; a newfound belief in the progress of mankind in religion, morality and political society; and the phenomenon of scientific advancement in a number of areas, including in our understanding of the universe. (Dictionary of Christianity and Science, 2017, 207)

Enlightenment-which followed the Reformation-is typically regarded as the accomplishment of modernism³. To speak very generally, many philosophers of this period began questioning not merely certain Roman Catholic doctrines-such as papal authority and indulgences-but **Christianity itself and the idea of divine revelation as a source of authority**.⁴

The Modern period is mainly known with: rise of the newly formed nation state, growth of tolerance as a political and social belief, Industrialization, rise of managed economy and capitalism, discovery and colonization of the Non-Western world, rise of representative democracy, increasing role of science and technology, Urbanization. With these multifaceted influences, the fate of religion especially in the western world was/is under question.

According to Dr. Paul Mar Gregorios, the beginning of the modern can be traced to that intellectual fever that spread in Europe from the middle of the 18th century. The French revolution of 1789 was a high point in the spread of these intellectual-spiritual as well as political-economic-social ferment in western society. The process lasted from mid-18th to mid-19th century and still spreading

³ It is a break with the past and the concurrent search for new forms of expression. Modernity also defined as a condition of social existence that is significantly different from all past forms of human experience, while modernization refers to the transitional process of moving from "traditional" or "primitive" communities to modern societies.

⁴ Douglas Groothuis, Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Modernism, 2000.

geographically, encompassing all cultures which adopt the urban-technological industrial system, with its capitalist mode of production, Calvinist-individualist "Value System", culture, medicine, communications system, educational system, and political-economic institutions, all based on human sovereignty and autonomy, that reject existences of God.⁵

1. Modern and Contemporary Apologetics

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in a period called "the Enlightenment," there was a great deal of apologetic works. Nevertheless, this period is known as a time when the opponents of orthodox Christian belief began to get the upper hand on Christian apologists. This is partially because Christians—Catholic and Protestant alike—continued to aim many of their arguments at each other and partially because the period of the Renaissance and Reformation made the ground fertile for an explosion of skepticism.

There were three reasons for this explosion of skepticism.

- **First**, the assumption that human Reason was sufficient to demonstrate the whole of Christianity began to wither as it was realized that many of the "proofs" for Christianity could be resisted by a well-motivated skeptic.

⁵ Modern, Post-Modern and the Future of Humanity, in *Philosophy East and West*, 2013, 211-228.

- **Second**, while the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were as much about politics as religion, the fact that hundreds of thousands of people were killed over what on the surface seemed to be a theological dispute between Catholics and Protestants decreased the tolerance of many of the survivors for religious fervor of any kind.
- **Third**, with the rise of Protestantism and its emphasis on the priesthood of the believer, the Bible was translated into vernacular languages and widely disseminated. The resulting explosion of heterodox readings of Biblical passages was fertile ground for objections to the reliability and authority of Scripture.

2. APOLOGETIC RESPONSE IN THE MODERN PERIOD

Until the Enlightenment, the task of the Christian apologist was relatively easy because the lines between Christian and non-Christian were relatively clear. The growing influence of deism in the Enlightenment, however, blurred those lines significantly. And that trend was to continue through the nineteenth century. The rise of historical biblical criticism, Protestant liberalism and Catholic modernism all constituted challenges to orthodox Christianity. In this context, Christian scholars began to reflect on the task of apologetics itself—its nature, its relationship to other theological disciplines and its methodology.

During this period there increasingly became two very distinct types of apologetics being practiced.

- The first is **traditional apologetics**—was primarily defensive and sought to respond to the attacks on traditional Christian beliefs;
- the second is **revisionist apologetics**—sought to forge a synthesis between Christianity and secular philosophies with the purpose of demonstrating the relevance of Christianity to cutting-edge intellectual endeavors. To the traditional apologists, revisionist apologists were barely Christian; to revisionist apologists, the arguments of traditional apologists were hopelessly out of date. The traditional apologist's desire is to defend orthodox theology, it is important also to look or examine at the contribution of the revisionists as well.

2.1. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834).

Friedrich Schleiermacher is an essential figure in the history of Christian thought in the west. Heavily influenced by the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), he forged an uneasy alliance between an emphasis on personal relationship of God and an emphasis on reason. His influential synthesis has given him the title the father of modern theology. While his work was theological, he clearly saw his task as apologetic—his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799) was an apologetic directed at skeptical intellectuals.

Taking a cue from deistic apologists, he took great pains to show that most traditional Christian doctrines can be reinterpreted in ways that do not offend modern sensibilities—miracle, inspiration, prophecy, immortality are all reinvented to avoid their becoming stumbling blocks to his skeptical audience. Because Schleiermacher accepted Kant's critique of speculative reason, he had no intention of seeking to prove God's existence. Neither was he interested in building an apologetic on Scripture, for he accepted the deistic critique of the concept of divine revelation.

Evaluate Schleiermacher's ideas on reinterpretation. How to re-interpret the Christian Doctrines to modern sensibilities? Can we drag the doctrines to our mode of life or shall we immerse into it? Concerning this Vladimir Lossky says:

We must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which appears to us as an unfathomable mystery, in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of the spirit, enabling us to experience it mystically... There is, therefore, no Christian mystery without theology; but, above all, there is no theology without mysticism...⁶

Schleiermacher's apologetic, therefore, responded to the spiritual poverty of the reason-only approach of the Enlightenment. He said, "Humanity and fatherland, art

⁶ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 8f.

and science . . . have taken possession of your minds so completely that no room is left over for the eternal and holy being that for you lies beyond the world."

In ignoring religion, Schleiermacher's "cultured despisers" had sought to divorce from themselves something absolutely fundamental to human existence, the inner experience of absolute dependence on something ultimate. So that is where Schleiermacher built his case for religion—on the universal sense of absolute dependence. The purpose of religion, he said, is to cultivate this sense of absolute dependence. After dismissing polytheism, he found Christianity superior to both Judaism and Islam. Judaism was too particularistic and was "nearly extinct," and Islam subordinated the moral order to sensuous pleasures. So his apologetic consisted of two steps:

1. Religion is necessary to human life, and
2. Christianity is the best religion.

2.2. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855).

Kierkegaard's influence on apologetics is complicated. Some see in Søren Kierkegaard, as in Luther before him, a total attack on the entire apologetic enterprise. And their conclusion is not without evidence. A theme running through all of Kierkegaard's writings is that faith cannot be reached by objective logical thinking. Rational proofs are not only wholly unnecessary for faith; they are, in fact,

antithetical to it. When Christianity is reduced to a set of propositions or a set of premises leading to a conclusion, then the personal commitment, passion and purposefulness that must necessarily characterize Christian life is lost. Rational proofs are only necessary when faith loses commitment and passion—when faith ceases to be faith.

Kierkegaard said:

If one were to describe the whole orthodox apologetical effort in one single sentence, but also with categorical precision, one might say that it has the intent to make Christianity plausible. To this one might add that, if this were to succeed, then would this effort have the ironical fate that precisely on the day of its triumph it would have lost everything and entirely quashed Christianity. Even if rational arguments produced a faith that was factually correct, it would still be problematic because such beliefs lack the degree of belief and strength of commitment that must necessarily accompany Christian belief.

For Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher embodied exactly what was wrong with apologetics. The attempt to make God's existence or the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ plausible to the people of his day inevitably resulted in compromising Christianity. Kierkegaard was writing at a time when nearly everyone professed to be a Christian, but relatively few held their beliefs with the enthusiasm and purposeful clarity of New Testament Christians. He said: "My intention is to make it

difficult to become a Christian, yet not more difficult than it is and not difficult for the obtuse and easy for the brainy, but qualitatively and essentially difficult for every human being."

Much of Kierkegaard's work was done under pseudonyms, which was part of his method of "indirect communication." His goal was not to argue for a concept directly but to talk about it in such a way that assisted people to come to the truth on their own terms.

1. For Kierkegaard, faith is ultimately irrational in human terms.

2. Accordingly, for Kierkegaard, Apologetics should not focus on arguments, but on lived experiences.

Concerning the first, it is better to know that Christianity as a faith is not ultimately irrational. And second, the focus of Apologetics should be on both arguments and lived experiences.

The current situation of the world poses many challenges on Orthodox Churches. It seems very difficult to respond to all challenges through the already existing approaches unless we find new insights, methods, and approaches. The emergence of secular or what they call it "post-Christian"⁷ society, the reluctant attitude towards religion, the issue of morality, and so many issues are in need of

⁷ Paul Chambers, Religion, Secularization and Social Change in Wales: Congregational Studies in Post-Christian Society, 2004.

responses.

3. Religious Attitude and Modernity

Modernity is defined as a condition of social existence that is significantly different to all past forms of human experience, while modernization refers to the transitional process of moving from “traditional” or “primitive” communities to modern societies. This perception affects religion, culture, and some other values that are attached with the past.

With a globalized modern world three end-results are expected:

- IT enhancement,
- Technological Advancement &
- Emergence of Global Culture.

Among these three the third one is very difficult for countries of cultures, Traditions, customs, history etc. like Ethiopia. The emergence of the global culture with a westernizing process is almost swallowing the existing religious-cultural values and promoting individual life systems in the name of development.

Culture is an agreed and collective life system. Culture enables people to share their memories, values, norms, and so on. In culture people search for unifying

factors like religion, history, and ethnic background. Culture encompasses the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society. Modernization of culture is associated with development.

3.1. Some thoughts on Development

What is development?

For African thinkers, one possible answer is that **development is modernization minus dependency.**⁸

The answer needs perspective. Some say to be developed we need to modernize everything. Then what is modernization? It is a process or change that is compatible with the present stage of human knowledge that seeks need to comprehend the legacy of the past, that is sensitive to the needs of the future. This could be the positive interpretation of modernization. How European colonizers tried to modernize Africa? African countries are more dependent on the western world. This can be seen in economic, military, education, and other areas. The end results of this dependency affected/affects religion, culture and the values emerge from these.

3.2. Some other significance of culture to the development of society:

A. Culture is lens of perception

As a lens of perception culture influences how people view themselves and their

⁸ Ali Mazrui, The Muse of Modernity.

environment.

B. Culture serves as a spring of motivation

What people experience as incentives or disincentives for certain patterns of behavior is greatly influenced by culture. In Ethiopia some cultural musics contributed to motivation of people during the times of war, works, and related happenings. But after the advent of protestants such kinds of values are in great danger. The problem is that all cultural activities are associated with immoral acts by non-participants in order to avoid those incentives from the people of the culture.

C. Culture also serves as a standard of judgment

What is right or wrong, what is virtuous or evil, what is beautiful or ugly are all greatly conditioned by culture.

D. Culture serves as the basis of stratification

The process of arranging persons into classes or social strata is a result of culture. Respects for elders, responsibilities for younger generation, protection and role for women, children, old people and so on, as an idea, emerge from culture.

E. Culture is a means of communication

Culture provides all sorts of nuances in communication and intimation. But above all, culture provides language in the literal sense of the legacy of words and lexicon. Here we can think about the role of language to development. Ali Mazrui asks can

any country approximate first-rank economic development if it relies overwhelmingly on foreign languages for its discourse on development and transformation?

F. Culture defines and influences production and consumption

By this, culture differs not only from country to country but also from region to region within a country.

G. Culture is the basis of Identity

Culture is crucial in defining who "we" and "they "are and in marking the frontiers solidarity.

Fr. Jossi Jacob discussed "cultural Modernity" with liberal trends in theology that affirmed the authority of humanity especially of the individual, over the traditional forms of religious authority. He also explained the protestant reformation's contribution in the emergence of modernity. As it is known the reformation was not a religious phenomenon alone, but social, cultural, political, etc. Issues are there.⁹

Perspectives on development are affecting religious systems and cultures. Here we are obliged by the need to investigate and introduce the role of orthodox Christian culture to development. In addition to the role, the ethical approach to development and prosperity must be revealed.

⁹ Apologetics II, Unpublished.

Orthodoxy, in many ways, is associated with poverty and with inconvenience to development. We need to respond to this. How to respond is an important issue to be discussed.

4. From Modernism to Postmodernism: A Question on Truth

Douglas Groothuis, discusses the basic differences between modernism and postmodernism as philosophical approaches, and between modernity and post-modernity as social condition.¹⁰ A great deal of ink has been spilled in discussion of the differences between modernism and postmodernism, when postmodernism was born, whether it should be called postmodernism or ultra-modernism or super-modernism or anti-modernism, and the like. Since many have argued that Christians lag behind the times by continuing to fight a modernist foe that no longer exists (or is near extinction), we also need to discern just how pervasive postmodernism is if we are to engage unbelievers on the appropriate terms. Both modernism and postmodernism have contributed to **truth decay** in our times, but each in its own way.

Postmodernism rejects certain key aspects of modernism, yet it retains certain affinities with it as well. What is common with them is that, both modernism and

¹⁰ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Modernism*, 2000.

postmodernism are largely non-theistic/atheistic; both either reject theism overtly or affirm agnosticism.¹¹ None of the leading post-modernist thinkers-whether Rorty, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard or Baudrillard affirm belief in a personal deity. This matches the later forms of modernism that abandoned even deism in favor of atheism or agnosticism. Modernists and postmodernists are united in their philosophical naturalism.¹² They deny the objective existence of God and the supernatural, and take the material universe to be all there is. Modernists defend this worldview through what they consider to be rational arguments that indicate objective reality, namely, that all is reducible to material processes. Postmodernists, such as Richard Rorty, reject the modernist view of universal human reason and objective truths but still (inconsistently) claim to be atheists or naturalists.

¹¹ **Agnosticism** is the view that the existence of God, of the divine or the supernatural is unknown or unknowable. Another definition provided is the view that "human reason is incapable of providing sufficient rational grounds to justify either the belief that God exists or the belief that God does not exist."

¹² In philosophy, naturalism is the idea or belief that only natural laws and forces operate in the universe. Adherents of naturalism assert that natural laws are the only rules that govern the structure and behavior of the natural world, and that the changing universe is at every stage a product of these laws

Their worldview, however, ends up being more of a preference or prejudice than a philosophically argued position in the classical sense, given the postmodernist disparaging of reason as a way to ascertain objective reality.

Now, the question in this post-modern culture is whether absolute truth is there or not. Previously it was which way is better to find the truth.

4.1. Truth in the Holy Scripture

The general notion of truth is massively contested. There are many theories of truth, including those with a fairly long history (the correspondence theory, the coherence theory, and the pragmatist theory) and those far more recent (the performative theory, the minimalist theory, and the disquotational view). Postmodern thought has also generated various theories of truth (or non-truth). There is massive and highly sophisticated literature on the topic, though it seems accurate to claim that the correspondence theory has been the view held by most philosophers.

The correspondence view/theory: the commonsense view of truth that "truth involves a relation to reality" means, a proposition is true if and only if its content fits reality.

The Coherence view: a proposition (P) is true if and only if coheres with the set of beliefs already believed. A proposition failing to mesh with other held beliefs would be rejected as false.

A pragmatist View: a proposition (P) is true if and only if holding the belief is useful to the prospective believer(s).

The concept of truth is crucial both to the central narrative of scripture and to historic Christianity. Scripture itself employs a rich and varied vocabulary of Truth.

The Holy Bible presents God as an absolute Truth.

God is true (or faithful) to his word and in his activities and attitudes; God is the God of truth. So, David prays, "Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth" (Ps 31:5; 2 Chronicle 15:3).

Through Isaiah, God declares, "I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right" (Is 45:19).

Likewise, people need to respond to the God of truth in truth: "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth" (Ps 145:18).

5. Theology and Post Modernism

Postmodernism poses excess challenges to Christian theology. First, given the postmodernists are claiming that an emphasis on the Bible as propositional

revelation is questionable or even errant. They argue that our view of Scripture must be reevaluated. Community should take precedence over doctrinal propositions.

Second, along these lines, some claim that theology should be primarily narrative in nature and not systematic or abstract and conceptual. Telling the Christian story should replace stipulating Christian doctrine. These contentions need a careful investigation if theology is to rise to the challenge of postmodernism.

A. Defend the authenticity (indisputable credibility) of the Holy Bible

B. The unchangeable features of Orthodox Theology

5.1. Postmodernism and Apologetics: Responding to the Challenges of the Time

We have seen how postmodernism affects the truth. Based on that view we need to ask ourselves how we defend the biblical world view in a postmodern world. And our approaches of defense need to answer to the spirits of the time. Some people are arguing that there should be a postmodernist strategy for postmodern challenges. This doesn't seem acceptable. The reason is, Christianity is always beyond human inventions and surpasses the wisdom of the times. We need to be able to show that Christianity has the solution which grounded in God's self-revelation, not invented yesterday.

5.2. Liberalism in Theology

Liberalism, which dominated much of the thought and social endeavor of European middle-class of 19th C., is related with reformation, enlightenment and the french revolution. The notion of liberty, freedom, individual rights are among the ideas widely spread with liberal concepts. As a consequence of these, separation of state and society, separation of both from church happened.¹³ According to Fr. Jossi Jacob (Dr.), Liberalism in Theology can be viewed as an attempt to restructure the religious system according to the paradigm of modernity.¹⁴ As quoted by him, Daniel Williams said: "It might be said with some accuracy that all theological liberals were modernists; but not all those who used modernist methods of interpretation shared the faith of the liberal theology, especially its optimistic estimate of human nature"¹⁵.

The major focuses of Liberal theology are in four areas:

1. Scientific analysis of sacred texts and practices with respect to their origins, their construction in the historical settings, their theological meanings in the current context detached from any interpretations if the religious communities;

¹³ Karl Rahner, (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology*, 1975, 837-842.

¹⁴ Christian Apologetics II, Unpublished.

¹⁵ 'Liberalism', *Handbook of Christian Theology* (New York, 1968) 207,208.

2. The formulation of the nature of human being through humanistic and social scientific studies apart from human being's being interpreted by any religion by highlighting the freedom of human being to define his or her own religion;
3. The third area is the understanding of the origin and continuation of the universe in scientific terms, especially those of evolution and astrophysics and attempt to adapt the doctrine of creation and providence to the scientific data;
4. Acceptance of morality as essentially independent of the command of God or commandments of the sacred texts. Liberals in this group consider the religious understanding of morality as something good to motivate human beings to find and develop the morality according to their time and situation¹⁶.

Each liberal theologian doesn't need to be concentrating or accepting all of the aforesaid approaches rather they may criticize each other for their theological standpoints. Generally liberal theologians can be included in one of the aforementioned categories according to their perspectives and approaches in theology.

5.3.Impact of Liberalism and Existentialism in the Life of Christian Believers

Many of the theological focuses of liberalism were not within the concern of an ordinary human being of the modern time, but their emphasis on freedom of rationality to define the religion by each person became an attraction to them.

¹⁶ Patrick R. Keifert, 'Liberalism', *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, 286.

Liberalism for many of the modern mind was liberation from the doctrinal authority held by the ecclesiastical communities. Theological liberals have always asserted the claims of reason against petrified Orthodoxy, and have sought freedom for diversity of belief in the Church. In the modern period they have declared the need of theology to incorporate the basic values, aspirations, and attitudes, which are associated with modern democratic culture. Insofar as theological liberalism emphasized the need to establish the relevance of Christian faith to the scientific and rational understanding of life it was closely allied with theological methods of modernism. ... The most characteristic theme of liberal theology, one which has been asserted throughout Christian history in various forms, is the emphasis of the freedom of man, his capability to responding to God and shaping his life in accordance with the divine will"¹⁷.

Widespread of Existentialism in the European society especially after the Second World War, prepared fertile soil for theological liberalism to flourish. The Existentialist ideas of significance of individual over the society and freedom of human beings to determine their own destiny are highly compatible in the liberal approach in theology, which put no boundaries of freedom in theology. Subjectivity and individual's judgment are highlighted as the norm for 'authentic existence' in existentialist thought. According to Søren Kierkegaard¹⁸, the pioneer

¹⁷ Daniel D. Williams, 'Liberalism', *Handbook of Christian Theology*, 207, 208.

¹⁸ Søren Kierkegaard was a Danish Philosopher of 19th century who introduced Existentialism as a

of Existentialism, 'truth is in subjectivity'.

Existentialism considers any sort of dependence as challenging the freedom or proper existence of the individual. According to the existentialist understanding while taking decisions, "one can never be certain that one has chosen rightly. Such an anxiety creates a confirming to some external authority (for example, the expectations of one's family or peers, cultural mores, an ethical code, or an authoritative figure). This renunciation of one's freedom is what many existentialists have labeled 'inauthentic existence'. Existentialism is a challenge to human individuals to become 'authentic' that is to exercise their freedom with awareness of their limits and to accept full responsibility of the choices they make"¹⁹. High level of subjective judgments and pressure on the individual to be detached from all sort of external elements causes radical liberalism. The existentialist approach in theologizing brought forward some crucial questions, "What is the source of religious authority? For the Christian, the question takes more specific form: What is the relationship between one's own experience and that claimed for Scriptures, the ritual, and the clergy?"²⁰ Liberalism provides freedom to answer these questions on an individual ground without considering any form of religious authority. Such a freedom attracts many of the modern minds

philosophical system. He was a theist who believed in the transcendence of individual towards God beyond the ethical norms of the society.

¹⁹ John C. Shelly, 'Existential Philosophy', *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, 177.

²⁰ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York, 1981) 181; as quoted in Paulos Mar Gregorios, *A Human God*, 72.

to theological liberalism and freedom to formulate and express their own religion.

The emphasis on individual's freedom in designing his religion is not a phenomenon appeared for the first time in the history, but a form religious experience promoted by Gnostics in the early centuries of Christianity. For many of the intellectuals who joined Christianity in its early phase Gnosticism was attractive as it present the Christ of solitude without Church, sacraments, dogma, clergy, creed and any sort of community experience. For them it was a "powerful alternative to what we know as Orthodox Christian tradition"²¹. Individualizing and interiorizing the Gospel and kingdom was a strong tendency in Gnostic approach and something similar appeared in F.D.E. Schleiermacher,²² who is considered to be the father of liberal theology.

The western Christianity declared liberty from the over oppressing theological systems holding Augustinian legacy. The widespread of Liberalism can be viewed as a reaction against the oppressing hierarchical authority of Catholic Church and fundamentalism of the reformed churches. It was a rejection of the understanding

²¹ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 181.

²² Frederic Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768 - 1834) defined religion as a 'sense and taste of infinite'. For him religion is based on intuitions and feelings and not on intellect and reason. For him feeling of dependence in God is the basic content of religion. He considers Jesus Christ as the man with perfect dependence in God. The ideal religion became perfectly real in Jesus Christ only and thus He became the first among the equals in the humanity. Through His absolute religious experience, He became the mediator between God and man and the evoker of Christian consciousness, the creative type of a new life and freedom, the living and self-communicative savior and the only redeemer in whom the redemptive forces reside.

of a punishing God with otherness from humanity, the sharp dualism between God and humanity in the Augustinian thoughts. In celebration of the liberty and independence liberalism forgot to keep the basic principles of Christian love which is a reflection of God's unconditional love and the communion and togetherness with the fellow believers and with God. Existentialism made each human an island detached from others.

6. Secularism and its Answer from the Church

Many people today believe that their religion does not help them answer the most important questions of life. They say that the most important questions are not about God and prayer, but those about politics and society, and the physical needs of the humanity. For them the most important questions are like these: Will there be enough food to feed the growing population? What is freedom and how can people live in freedom? How can the nations share the resources equally? How can development be encouraged in all countries of the world? How can governments control the population growth? How can we prevent people from wasting the resources? How can the international organizations keep peace in the world society? Some of the thinkers and activists who tried to find answers for such questions feel that religions have little to say to help them. They think that religious teachings are old-fashioned and conservative. They became impatient and no longer pay attention to religious teachers, and they give up prayer and worship.

Even when the people are not concerned about political and economic questions like these, they are often passed by modern ways to give up the practice of religion. People measure success by the amount of material wealth a person possesses. Those who wish to be successful has to work hard especially in urban and business communities. Naturally the stress of life caused an erosion of religious consciousness among the people. Life today especially in towns therefore marked by what is called a 'secularist' approach to life.

Secularism is a way of thinking and acting which concentrates on the current problems and issues which people face in this world. The English word Secularism derived from the Latin word *Saeculum* which means time. According to secularist perspective human beings' time on this earth alone is important and not anything concerns God and eternity. Secularism therefore treats religious questions as irrelevant. It is the attitude of many people living in the developed countries in the west and is rapidly becoming the trend among the people of different nations in Africa and Asia. The emerging trends of secularism in the urban communities of the east must really be the concern of the religious groups.

Theoretically secularism tried to answer many questions of reality including the existence of this universe. Humanity is placed in the central position instead of God and it became an ideology called *Secular Humanism*. Darwinian theories of evolution ideologically support this tendency. Theologically, Secular Humanists are atheists. They believe that the God concepts are products of human imagination.

Philosophically, Secular Humanists are naturalists. That is, they believe that nature is all that exists - the material world is all that exists. There is no God, no spiritual dimension and no afterlife. Secular Humanist beliefs in the area of biology are closely tied to both their atheistic ideology and their naturalist philosophy. If there is no supernatural, then life, including human life, must be the result of a purely natural phenomenon. Hence, Secular Humanists must believe in evolution. Atheism leads most Secular Humanists to adopt ethical relativism - the belief that no absolute moral code exists, and therefore man must adjust his ethical standards in each situation according to his own judgment. If God does not exist, then He cannot establish an absolute moral code. So they argue that human beings may, and do, make up their own rules. Morality is not discovered; it is made. Secular Humanism, then, can be defined as a religious worldview based on atheism, naturalism, evolution, and ethical relativism.

Human reason is placed over all the authorities of Scripture, tradition, and all cultural principles and ideas which are valued by the society for generations. Immanuel Kant, famous Philosopher of 18th century defines enlightenment: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. **Sapere aude!** "Have courage to use your own reason!"- that is the motto of enlightenment."

(Extracted from an essay of Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?* Published in 1784) As it seems this so called motto of enlightenment is taken up by many in this period of Globalization.

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios summarizes the attitude of secularism into two aspects, namely, **the eclipse of God and the autonomy of man**, for him which constitute the Secular ethos of our world today.²³ The attitude of placing human reason over and against anything including God is actually confining humanity to the narrow space of their cognition and empirical data they could collect from time to time. By following secularist ideologies and making it a principle determining the way of life one is limiting him or her from the immense energy they could acquire from the ultimate source of it, God the almighty, and to grow towards Him and to be like Him.

Secularism directly contradicts with the faith content of Christianity. Church cannot ignore the ideologies misguiding humanity and making them deviant from its original purpose, which is to become like God in communion with him. The Church, through her faithful members, has to open up her eyes to see what is happening around us. The response towards secularism must be in two ways, theoretical and practical. Theoretically the Church has to defend the need and reality of the existence of God as creator and preserver. God's involvement and in the

²³ Extracted from a paper presented by Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Worship in a Secular Age*, at 8th General Assembly of Syndesmos in Boston, USA., 1971

sustainability and functioning of the universe is to be explained to convince the people. Arguments are to be put forward in a convincing manner to yield the confused mind of the educated people especially youngsters and to lead them into the way of truth; into *Orthodoxy* and *Orthopraxis*.

In the other hand side the members of the Church must take care of identifying and providing necessary support to sort out the major issues people in each society face. Neglecting the practical aspects of life of people and attempting to divert the attention by highlighting the aspects of life after death may not be a fruitful way of handling the educated people of current society. Church has to be concerned of all the aspects of the life of the people and to provide them proper guidance and courage to face the real issues in life with proper dependence in God and ethical and moral solidarity. Great Orthodox fathers of early centuries have expressed great concern to address the problems of the society and to encourage and equip the people with strong faith and moral consciousness. Church has to express proper spiritual dynamism in this phase of emerging secularism.

7. Secular Humanism

Secular Humanism is a movement in in the west. Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good. (American Humanist Association)



International Academy of Humanism was established in 1997 and its signatories included Francis Crick, Richard Dawkins, and others agreed on "Human Cloning". Human cloning is the creation of a genetically identical copy of a human. The term is generally used to refer to artificial human cloning, which is the reproduction of human cells and tissue. It doesn't refer to the natural conception and delivery of identical twins.

Most scientists agree that it is unsafe and likely to lead to serious abnormalities and birth defects, and others also argue for it.²⁴ The following can be an example for an argument for human cloning.

"What moral issues would human cloning raise? Some religions teach that human beings are fundamentally different from other mammals-that humans have been imbued with immortal souls by a deity, giving them a value that cannot be compared to that of other living things. Human nature is held to be unique and sacred. ...

As far as the scientific enterprise can determine, Homo sapiens is a member of the animal kingdom. Human capabilities appear to differ in degree, not in kind, from

²⁴ Michael J. Sandel, the Ethical Implications of human Cloning, 2005.

those found among the higher animals. Humankind's rich collection of thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and hopes seems to arise from electrochemical brain process, not from an immaterial soul that operates in ways no instrument can discover ... A view of human nature rooted in humanity's mythical past ought not to be our primary criterion for making moral decisions about doing.²⁵



Humanism vs Secularism		
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	Humanism	Secularism
DEFINITION	Humanism refers to a rationalist system of thought attaching primary importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters	Secularism refers to the principle of separation of the state affairs from religious institutions.
NATURE	Emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, preferring rationalism and empiricism over the acceptance of superstition or dogma	Advocates that religion has no place in state affairs, and that there should be a complete separation between religion and state.

²⁵ (Free Inquiry Magazine, vol.17, no.3, 1997; see Leon Kass, *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics*, San Francisco, Encounter Books, 2002.)

