

Dr. A'vani [just] referred as *Seculum*. That is to say, embracing the world has emerged in opposition to withdrawal from the world, which seems to be [a phenomenon] peculiar to Christianity. Because of the power of the West, secularization has turned into a world movement and a strong school. In my opinion, this movement is tantamount to embracing the very world that God has condemned. God rejects a world which secularism intends to espouse without paying any attention to God..."

"In my opinion, one can find two reasons for secularism: One is man's inner self which has resisted any movement to have it controlled, and the history is replete with such acts of resistance. The other cause is the weakness of religion in running the affairs of the world, as it happened in the history of Christianity. These two factors led to the emergence of secularism. Of course, secularism in its modern sense accepts God and the Hereafter and only pushes aside the social aspects of religion. Lately, they have found out that one cannot ignore even the social aspects. Therefore, there has appeared a return to an organized spirituality. But they are still facing a problem in the area of running the worldly affairs. The latest efforts by the Church is to make up for a weakness which it has had throughout history. It is here that we can draw an appropriate connection between Islam and secularism. The secularism that rose up against the weak Christianity of the Middle Ages and prodded the human reason to movement and activity, so that it would face the challenge and would develop science, the same secularism finally led to the domination of the world and [the manifestation of] different aspects of secularization. At any rate, with a new definition, one can avoid a confrontation between Islam and secularism. In this manner, Islam would not be in the same trench as Christianity, and the approach toward secularism would be different...."

Dr. A'vani:

"Throughout history, secularism has developed in Europe..."

The birthplace of secularism is Europe, the very Europe in which Christianity was prevalent. Secularism has emerged from Christianity and is against Christianity. Jesus [PBUH] says 'Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's'. In other words, if someone did not do that, he would not be called a Christian.

But the interesting point here is that secularism has infiltrated the civilizations in which this dichotomy does not exist, such as the Indian civilization. In Islam it is decreed that 'Do not forget your share of the life in this world.' At any rate, the world has its own place and the Hereafter, too, has its own..."

Dr. Ahmadi:

"Secularism has entered the Islamic world, but sometimes, as in the case of Europe, it enters as a current which is universally accepted. [But] sometimes a group of people who do not believe in a comprehensive and universal religion, would like to implement the ways of secularism. In Islamic lands, however, a universal movement like the one that occurred in the West did not occur. This is because of the revelation and the law in the religion of Islam. But there have always been individuals who have supported secularism...."

Mr. Avini:

"I wanted to ask if secularism is limited to the West. I think we need to discuss what Dr. Ahmadi has [just] said. Is it only a certain number of individuals or limited currents that have had secularist tendencies? Hasn't secularism taken over Islamic world as a universal current. Another question that I would like to raise is: Should one look for the causes of emergence of secularism within the domain of human customs and relations or should we look for these causes in the relation between man and God? In other words, do we see the emergence of secularism as effects of such issues as economic ties, urbanization, rise of bourgeoisie, and the like in the Renaissance period? In my opinion, regarding the causes for the rise of secularism, our discussion has veered towards the effects. Whereas it seems that all of these views and currents within the domains of philosophy, religion, society, economy and politics are themselves part of the definition of secularism, and not causes of the advent of secularism."



in Christianity, knowledge and religion are opposed to each other, because the Bible portrays knowledge as the Forbidden Tree. This approach led to the opposition between science and religion. Hence, with the advancement of science, the Church saw it incumbent upon itself to defend the perimeter of religiosity....”

“Indeed, today’s man does not subscribe to the view that saw it necessary to fulfill divinely ordained duties. The following issues have contributed to the emergence of this mood in modern man: the separation of religion from all aspects of life, considering religion a personal and inner matter, viewing man as the measure of all things, the belief that man can resolve all his problems through his reason as well as the view that through freedom he can obtain whatever he wants and reach his ultimate goal which is happiness in this life. Today’s man thinks that he has the ability to formulate the laws needed for the individual, society and government. If there exists a God, it would not be necessary for Him to define man’s duty. This is the same view espoused by some of the Muslim intellectuals. Actually, they believe that the contemporary man is seeking his own rights. He has rights and feels that he is able to secure his rights. There is no longer any need for him to be a duty-bound man...”

“If we believe that God has created man, and because of His knowledge of the nature of man, has devised rules necessary for the life of the individual and society, then man feels he is bound by duty. One does not feel that one is required to follow the divine rules if one believes that man is essentially a rational, contemplative and thinking being and that he, aided by his reason and thought, can formulate all the laws needed by the individual and the society, and there would not be any need to follow the divine rules. This view is rooted in the rejection of the principle that ‘The rules derived from revelation, are absolutely fitted for man’. If we look deeper into this way of thinking, we realize that whenever man starts exercising doubts about his belief in God, the revelation and the rules set by God, the duty-bound man is replaced by a man who thinks he has the absolute power to formulate and implement rules....”

Dr. Haddad ‘Adel:

“In Europe, undoubtedly a group of rulers, kings and even officials of the Church

committed tyranny. They imposed their own selfish desires on the people under the pretext that it was the word of God. This problem is not specific to Europe and has precedence in the Islamic world as well. In the name of God and the Prophet, the Ummayyad and Abbassid caliphs committed many crimes against the people. But what happened in Europe is that the very existence of God and the religion itself are viewed with skepticism because a group of impostors imposed themselves on the people, abusing the people’s belief in God. I believe that one should not mix these two issues. In a period of human history people exercised doubts about religion due to deviation, extremism and tyranny. But I believe that we still have sufficient rational proofs in defence of religion and religious government....”

Dr. Dinani:

“We must not say that there is not any room left for religiosity because in the history of the Church a group of people abused religion. As far as I know most of thinkers and great men of Europe are against the Church, and not against God or Christ. In fact, they were against the crimes committed by the Popes. When I was reading the biography of Anatole France, the French anti-religious writer, I noticed that he hates the actions of the Popes and the history of the Church, but deep in his heart he was not against God and Christ. He was [merely] disgusted with the history of the Church and atrocities of the Popes. Or could we say that Nietzsche was truly irreligious and against God? Despite the fact that he and his father were clergymen, he was against them. I cannot say that the history of the West today does not pay any attention to religion, especially in modern physics where many scholars and great scientists are showing a keen interest in religion.”

Mr. Sho’ae:

“I think that there is a misunderstanding about secularism as a school of thought and secularization as the socialization process of this thought, leading some to believe that the phenomenon that has occurred in the West is the sign of greatness of that school. Dr. Dinani pointed to the fact that since the advent of Christianity secularism was used in contrast to withdrawal from the world, i.e. the withdrawal from the very thing which became the goal of secularism. It is of note here that God in the Holy Qur’an disapproves of a world to which

religious affairs, separating politics, government, economy, courts, education, arts and the like from the sacred domain. The secular thought is, indeed, the realization of this famous saying in the Bible that one should give unto Caesar what is his and to God what is His..."

"Here I would like to point to a few points so that we may discuss them. First, what is the connection between secularism and the negation of divine authority in general? I believe that secularism is a manifestation of liberalism. It is a manifestation of this fact that modern man has taken over the place of God and does not want to accept any person or any source of authority except man himself. Otherwise, we cannot remain secular if we accept that in our world there is a source named God who has the right to dictate to us in our lives and that we are bound by duty to follow his commands. Second, sometimes it is said that an issue, once given rational explanation, can no longer be a religious issue. It seems that the premise here is that issues are of two types: One type is the heavenly issues that are sacred, mysterious and vague, issues that are related to revelation and God's religion, about whose rational aspect we are not concerned. Another set of issues, are the ones that are rational and understandable and we can understand their secrets through the medium of science. These issues are deemed to be outside of the domain of religious concepts. Hence if an issue is based on reason and reasoning, it is considered a worldly and secular matter. Issues that are personal, close to one's heart, mysterious, amazing, vague, spiritual and related to the inner world, acquire a religious dimension. This classification is among the premises of secularism."

Dr. Davari:

"In modern Europe and the West, and perhaps all over the earth, perhaps one can find people who might be 'secular' but would not reject the revelation and God.."

Dr. Haddad 'Adel:

"Yes. As you have stated, secularism does not mean atheism and unbelief. There have been people in Europe who believed in God and Christianity but they were secular. These people are the ones who consider religion as an emotional connection between man and God. These very people also believe that, aside from the relationship between man and God, [all other relations including] the social relations should be governed by reason and science, and that legislation should be done in a democratic manner, and so forth. As was said before, secularism does not mean a negation of God, even though in a secularist society there is not any difference between the social life of those who do not believe in God and religion and that of others who believe in God. The issue is like the difference in personal taste between two persons, each preferring his own favorite color; however, they are both capable of cooperating with each other. The social relations between those who believe in God and who are secular and those who do not believe in God is of this type."

Mrs. Mahrou-Zadeh:

"In order to analyze the issue of secularism, one should start from the thirteenth century. As the way was paved for the progress of science, the confrontation between science and religion gradually manifested in different ways. As you might know, some believe that



superficial and ignorant question when it is asked? Who said that we should not ride the planes and use camels and houdahs? The issue is not the refutation of the new world or proving the old world. The issue is: What ends are the things called means in the present world supposed to achieve? What is the relationship between the way we use these tools and our thought, belief, conduct and worldview, as well as the way we relate to the existing world and its origin? In the existing order within the world, the things and tools are organized in such a way that they would contribute to the achievement of the aims of the secularization. It might be said that this is a statement in favor of determinism and leads to the conclusion that there are no choices and we have to sit and stay worried about what will happen. This is not determinism. This is freedom. Our choices are not reduced to Hobson's choice if we invite each other to be alert and see where the paths lead and which means are used towards which ends, and how the new world has been organized. But it is a form of pure ignorance to think that everyone would be able to pick everything from everywhere and use it anywhere and for whatever purpose. But there is a complicated point here which has become a source of misunderstanding.

From what has been said some infer that the present world is a totality, and if they want to abstract a part of this world, they would have to either reflect on its totality or give up abstracting the part. Indeed, the world of secularization is a totality and has a process and a destination and all the means are both germane and a function of the destination and process. One cannot find any fault with this statement in its place..."

Forum on Secularism and Culture

Participants in the forum were Dr. Gholamali Haddad 'Adel, Dr. Gholamreza A'vani, Seyyed Mohammad Avini, Dr. Ahmad Ahmadi, Dr. Gholamhossein Ebrahimi Dinani, Mrs. Mahrou-Zadeh, Mohammad Ali Sho'ae and Dr. Reza Davari Ardakani. In what follows, you will read translation of selected views expressed by the participants. The forum's moderator was Dr. Reza Davari Ardakani.

Dr. Davari:

"I would like to thank the respected scholars who accepted our invitation to attend this forum. Here we want to discuss secularism in general, and secularism and Islam in particular...."

"One other important question is this: Is the secularism that has emerged in the Islamic countries the same secularism that appeared in Europe? In other words, has our perception of secularism been the same as that of Europe? Finally, what is the status of secularism at the moment? May I ask Dr. Haddad 'Adel the following questions. In your opinion, what is the meaning of secularism? Whence and how has secularism come into being?"

Dr. Haddad 'Adel:

"Regarding the meaning of the word 'secularism' and how it became prevalent in European texts, one must say that apparently up to the 17th-century in Europe the lands and real estate properties that had belonged to the Church were administered by the officials of the Church. After the Westphalia Agreement, the Church officials no longer controlled the said lands and properties which were given to non-clerical officials to control. This action was called secularization. It was from then that this idea became prevalent. This seems to be the oldest usage of the word 'secular', which is connected to its meaning today. But the meaning of the word 'secularization' is: separating the worldly affairs from the