

IS “THE WORLD” A PROBLEM? A TEILHARDIAN RESPONSE

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Introduction

Charles Taylor has diagnosed the secularism of our age through the interlocking constellation of cosmic, social and moral orders, understood as purely immanent orders devoid of transcendence and functioning *etsi Deus non daretur*, “as if God would not exist.” This phenomenological experience, according to Taylor, constitutes our age as a secular one, whether or not people hold to religious or theistic beliefs. The word *saeculum* originally meant an indefinite period of time but became part of the dyad, religious-secular, which structured the spatial-temporal reality of medieval Christendom and became a synonym for godly-ungodly. To secularize is to make worldly or to convert religious things into secular ones.¹ Interestingly, Taylor identifies modern unbelief not simply as the absence of belief but as the development of stadal consciousness, that is, a consciousness of emancipation from the irrationality of belief.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin provides an alternative to Taylor’s diagnosis of secularity that is thoroughly Christian and secular. Whereas Taylor sees the secularization of modernity as a new form of consciousness, Teilhard sees growth in consciousness as the depth dimension of the secular, the discovery of the divine milieu. By exploring the physical process of evolution as a centrating phenomenon by which Someone and not Something is in evolution, Teilhard sees cosmic evolution as a centrating process of Christogenesis. Christ evolves through the unfolding physical process of evolution by the power of the Spirit. Teilhard emphasized that the Incarnation fulfills God’s relationality by contributing to God that which God is not—material reality. Evolution, therefore, will always be integral to God because it reveals the nature of God to be relational and participative and hence open to novelty and the future. God draws us from the future to become more united, more one-in-love, more Christ. As self-reflected beings-in-evolution, humans are to continue weaving the process of evolution towards greater wholeness. Christianity, in particular, is faith in the progressive unification of the world in God—unity with the natural world, unity with other religions, unity with other planets, unity with all people. Christians are to be engaged unifiers in a world of evolution, working towards the *pleroma*, the fullness of plurality in unity which is Christ.

By seeing evolution as the science of Christ, Teilhard offers a refreshingly new view of secularity that situates both cultural and historical analysis in a metaphysics of spirit-matter unfolding. His “deep secularity” provides an integrative view of the world by which the secular does not collapse religion into an immanent frame but where the tiniest particle of matter discloses the divine in the details of its own createdness. Secularity is first cosmic before it is human, and it is integral to evolution; thus, it is not a fall from religion but the flourishing of religion which corresponds to a consciousness of evolution as the unfolding of God from within. After some historical background regarding the question of secularity, I explore Teilhard’s contribution to the question of secularity and examine his view of evolution as one that discloses a depth dimension of the divine, a dynamic unfolding process that is thoroughly incarnational and future-oriented.

¹ José Casanova, “Are We Still Secular? Exploring the Post-Secular: Three Meanings of ‘the Secular’ and their Possible Transcendence,” (paper presented at New York University, Institute for Public Knowledge, October 22-24, 2009), 1-2.