

REV. GRZEGORZ ROZBORSKI

SECULARISM AS A CHALLENGE FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A b s t r a c t. Secularism is a founding principle of the United States of America. Historically, Americans have viewed secularism as a means to protect freedom of religion for its citizenry from a state imposed religion or, conversely, state imposed agnosticism. The American Catholic Church in the 21st century respects the separation of Church and State because it upholds the principle of religious freedom. Contemporary aggressive secularism becomes a challenge for the Church as it increasingly hinders the realization of her mission in the world. Secularism is also a challenge for pastoral theology, whose task is to create models of pastoral activity adapted to the conditions of a specific place and time. Thus, the problem of this study can be expressed in the following question: what is the perception of secularism in the United States, what challenges does it present for the Catholic Church in the 21st Century and how is the Church to fulfill her mission in American society? The answer will be established through analysis of universal Church documents, presentation of the teaching of the Church in the United States and review of the publications of American theologians and sociologists.

This article reviews the historical, cultural and ecclesiastical understanding of secularism in the United States as an ideology, and compares it to the modern understanding of secularism as it pertains to the organization of American society. Furthermore, it evaluates the impact of secularism as ideology and overarching societal organization on the modern American Catholic Church, the Church's role and impact in American society and the Church's vital and moral need to maintain its relevance through evangelization and ongoing participation in social justice issues in American society despite its minority status and the impact of recent scandals.

Keywords: secularism; Catholic Church; 21st century; relativism; freedom of religion; separation of Church and State.

Rev. GRZEGORZ ROZBORSKI – presbyter of Detroit Diocese, student of pastoral theology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: e-mail: frgregkul@gmail.com; ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2201-6164>.

Ks. GRZEGORZ ROZBORSKI – prezbiter diecezji Detroit, student specjalizacji teologia praktyczna w Teologicznym Studium Licencjackim KUL; adres do korespondencji: frgregkul@gmail.com; ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2201-6164>.

Secularism (lat. *saecularis*) is a broad concept and does not have a sufficiently defined meaning. In social sciences, secularism is usually understood as “the process of gradual liberation of various sectors of society and culture from the reign of religious institutions and symbols.”¹ Secularism as a social process consisting in limiting the influence of religious institutions and religious meaning systems on socio-cultural reality dates back to the Middle Ages. Started in the field of politics, and then under the influence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, it was gradually extended to other areas of society and culture (art, philosophy, literature). The industrialization and urbanization processes also significantly contributed to the deepening of this phenomenon. The radical aspirations to limit the influence of religion on social life, articulated by various ideologies, resulted in the emergence of secularism (laicization) in addition to a descriptive and neutral understanding of the secularization process, which became an ideology hostile to all religion. Thus, in any analysis of the phenomenon of secularism, one should distinguish at least three of its meanings: a) secularism as a social fact; b) secularism as a principle of social life; c) secularism as an ideology. The process of secularism affects all religions and denominations today, but it is a special challenge for the Catholic Church, as it means the weakening of institutional forms of piety as well as religious meanings and justifications.²

Secularism as a separation of Church and State is a founding principle of the Constitution of the United States of America. “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;”³—The first amendment of the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution defines the paradox of the Catholic Church in the United States in the first phrase. The secularism which grants the greatest protection, also poses the greatest existential threat to the Catholic Church in 21st century America. It is difficult for the Catholic Church to oppose the secularization of society when it affords its protection and promotes its ability to thrive. Yet, as the morality of society becomes secularized, the notion of adhering to Christian values, and the high moral standards of faith seems contrary to the concept of personal freedom. Perhaps no case demonstrates both the threat of secularism to individual freedom of belief and the protection thereof, then the case of US Supreme Court Justice Amy

¹ Kazimierz Świąć, “Sekularyzacja,” in *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, edited by Ryszard Kamiński, Wiesław Przygoda, Marek Fiałkowski (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2006), 785.

² Świąć, “Sekularyzacja,” 785–788.

³ US Constitution, Bill of Rights, First Amendment. <https://www.aclu.org/united-states-bill-rights-first-10-amendments-constitution>.

Coney Barrett. In both her initial confirmation to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in 2017, and her ultimate confirmation to the US Supreme Court, her Roman Catholic faith drew malicious attacks toward her candidacy. No statement was more contentious than when Senator Diane Feinstein objected, “The dogma lives loudly within you. And that is of concern.” Unwittingly, it was Senator Feinstein who drew ire, as it was her own derogatory comments that were viewed as anti-Catholic, anti-religious and therefore unconstitutional. In fact, Justice Barrett’s youth and large family represents the vulnerable position held by conservative female professionals in today’s society. As noted by Jennifer A. Frey, “...But for faithful Catholic woman in particular, especially those of us who cannot hide the fact we strive to adhere to the Church’s unpopular teachings about sex and contraception—ie Catholic mothers of large families—this anti-Catholic bias takes an especially ugly, sexist form.”⁴ Promoting Christian values among young people in modern America, therefore, becomes challenging as popular culture is different from the high moral standards of faith. The younger generations might perceive Christianity as a restriction, which explains one dilemma that Church communities face. Robert J. Spitzer writes that the number of American millennials, people born from 1981 through 1996, who are religiously unaffiliated are self-defined “nones.” Statistically, a higher percentage of millennials define themselves as atheists or agnostics, compared to previous generations. In 2014, 35% of millennials identified themselves as religiously unaffiliated. Additionally, 49% of people who grew up in religious families report they have turned away from faith in adulthood.⁵ In 21st century America, secularism’s rise is outpacing the religious world view. These societal changes demand that the Church find a practical solution to integrate more fully into the contemporary, predominantly secular society.

1. THE PARADOX OF SECULARISM IN THE USA

It is critical to define the notion of secularism to understand the main problem of the discussion. It is possible to state that secularization is the movement from a predominantly religious society to the secular society,

⁴ Frey Jennifer A., “Like Amy Coney Barrett, I’m a professional woman criticized form my big, Catholic Family,” *USAToday*. Published Oct 15, 2020. [USAToday.com](https://www.usatoday.com).

⁵ Robert J. Spitzer, “Confronting Secularism Today,” *United States Conference for Catholic Bishops*, 2021, <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/enlisting-witnesses/confronting-secularism-today>.

where culture, political life, economy, and relationships between people are not regulated by the Church. J. Casanova writes that the tendency towards secularization from religious society is usually perceived as progress by the majority of people. The majority of individuals would say that modern civilization has a higher level of secularization compared to the 19th century when the Church still had some influence on social, cultural, and political life. It is associated with globalization and movement from faith in dogmas to the scientifically justified world view and liberal society.⁶

A common observation among American Theologians claims that people often fail to distinguish between secularism as the ideological perspective and secularism as the principle of a state organization. Traditionally, secularism as the form of organizing the state is regarded as a positive phenomenon because it limits the Church's influence and makes the administration more diverse and thus influential. Secularism in ideology leads to the loss of ethical orientation, which does not allow people to find a moral basis for their lives and spiritual support. It is possible to illustrate this difference between the two types of secularism with the following excerpts:

[...] modern secularism also comes in multiple historical forms, in terms of different normative models of legal-constitutional separation of the secular state and religion, or in terms of the different types of cognitive differentiation between science, philosophy, and theology, or in terms of the different models of practical differentiation between law, morality, and religion.⁷

Thus, there is a notable difference between secularization in the organization of the state and ideology. The modern Catholic Church does not think that the secular state is the problem. Though, there is the opinion that the decrease of the Church's popularity in spiritual life might lead to severe problems with ethics and culture in the near future. The peculiar detail is that people who are not connected with the Church and with religious life, do not associate this movement towards secularization in ideological questions with the moral decline and the destruction of traditional cultural and social patterns. They assume that the secular world proposes a new form of morality that would satisfy all people's needs without imposing religious restrictions on them. Such views on secularization are imaginary in the majority of situations.

⁶ José Casanova, "The Secular and Secularisms," *Social Research* 76(2009), 4: 1050.

⁷ Casanova, "The Secular and Secularisms," 1051.

Hugh Montefiore agrees that modern intellectual debate ignores Christian religion as the world view that is worthy of attention. It is a real problem in the secularized society because religion has much to say concerning truth and human existence. The researchers claim the problem that leads to this situation is the reflective view of the Catholic Church which was evident during the recent decades. Among the issues that the Church tried to solve was the preoccupation with attitudes of the Catholic doctrine to the ordination of women, the questions connected with remarriages and divorces, and the attitudes to sexual minorities.⁸ The Church did not manage to keep pace with the tendencies that changed the Western society, which made the religious perspective old-fashioned in its traditionalism and thus not interesting for many people. This idea is especially true for young people.

Montefiore emphasizes an interesting detail that religion existed even in communistic countries where it was prohibited on the official level. The example from the 20th century illustrates this assumption. In the 20th century, the Soviet government regarded the Church as the enemy of the State. This did not deter the persistent existence of the Church, nor the people who attended. Moreover, after the Soviet Union dissolved, the number of Christians in former Soviet republics increased significantly.⁹ Thus, active and aggressive anti-religious propaganda was not able to ruin the religion. People still consider religion as a way of salvation and the spiritual support that helps them to survive.

It is critical to understand that modern secularism is based on the idea that religion is the faith in the magical illusion that is impossible to prove from a rational point of view. The Bible, in its turn, is the collection of myths and fairy tales that have no facts that prove the described miracles. The main point in the secular or atheistic worldview is that modern homo sapiens are intellectually developed, so people cannot believe in primitive things like religion. Secularism is based on the Enlightenment rationalism, which makes it the reflection of the essence of modernity and Western culture.¹⁰ This perspective is quite radical, and it does not correspond to the real state of things. There are many historical proofs that the events described in the Holy Scripture happened and Jesus Christ was the historical person who once lived and preached. The supporters of secularism prefer to disregard such evidence,

⁸ Hugh Montefiore, *Reclaiming the High Ground: A Christian Response to Secularism* (Palgrave: Macmillan UK, 1990), 7.

⁹ Casanova, "The Secular and Secularisms," 8.

¹⁰ Casanova, "The Secular and Secularisms," 9.

emphasizing the irrational nature of the Christian faith and praising natural science and logic instead of God.

It is possible to hypothesize that secularism is supported by the media, which aggravates the situation. Even though there is no official ban on religion in the United States, the mainstream media still promotes the image of the secular person. The following excerpt from the book by Montefiore illustrates this idea with the following:

There can be little doubt that the mass media ignore religion as much as they can. A person, perusing the hundred-plus pages of the Sunday Times, would find it hard to find any mention of God or the Churches. In the media as a whole, the Church is seldom news except when its clergy are involved in a scandal, or when statements are made by religious leaders which impinge upon the preoccupations of the press with sex or politics.¹¹

This passage shows that popular media emphasizes only negative issues from the life of the Church. This corresponds to the secular agenda, harming the image of Christian religion and decreasing religion's status in the eyes of those who engage the media. This aspect of secularism shows that all tendencies in American culture have their explanation and results, and critique of the religious world view is not the exception from this rule. When the media portrays negative issues connected with the Christian faith, it is logical that people who have hesitations concerning their religious views would have more doubts. Their attitude toward the Church would be more damaged. They would read only about scandals and negative critiques of religion in the media, which would elevate the stance of secularism in their eyes. As a result, more people would turn to secularism instead of Catholicism.

2. THE CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC DISCOURSE ON SECULARISM IN THE USA

The message of the Gospel is not irrelevant; when an institution fails to connect with the next generation, the institution itself becomes irrelevant. How the Catholic Church demonstrates its relevance and fosters faith in secular American society, is of differing opinions among theologians. Some theologians claim that it is critical for the Catholic Church to search for

¹¹ Casanova, "The Secular and Secularisms," 10.

scientific validation of faith and miracles. The religious discourse would correspond to the overall secularization of modern society. For example, R.J. Spitzer writes about validating the theory of the intelligent creator that might make religion more justified from the rational point of view.¹² Other theologians consider such appeals to science ineffective. Instead of appealing to reason alone, the Church should show people that it can satisfy their needs on a spiritual basis; to give them hope and consolation in difficult situations, and to respond adequately to their problems. The “World Value Survey (from 1981 to 2014) found that individual religiosity and country level of development play a significant role in shaping peoples subjective well-being (SWB). Protestants, Buddhists and Roman Catholics were happier and most satisfied with their lives compared to other groups ... Of these, Roman Catholics had the highest life satisfaction scores.”¹³ It is possible to state that the Catholic Church understands these tendencies and evolves with modern culture, trying to satisfy the spiritual needs of contemporary Christians.

The dialogue between the Church and the world is an integral part of religious life. Pope John Paul II discussed the dangers connected with secularism and its destructive effect on human lives. He regarded communism as one of the most dangerous representations of secularism because it destroys the morality and the ethics of the society. He claimed that it is critical for Poland, his country of origin, to pursue the religious way of development, as it is the only way to save the society from moral degradation and gradual decay. He agreed that the Catholic Church should support people when the government violates social and political liberties. The adequate reaction of the Catholic Church is sharing knowledge among the congregation and the bishops, honest exchange of experience, promotion of the pastoral activity in all counties, and timely reformation of Catholic ecclesiastical structures that should combine with the emphasis on classical Christian doctrine.¹⁴ According to Pope John Paul II, this quest for freedom and justice requires much spiritual energy from faithful people. Moreover, it shows that the Catholic Church needs to transform, to keep pace with these transformations. At the

¹² Casanova, “The Secular and Secularisms,” 10.

¹³ Kayonda Hubert Ngamaba and Debbie Soni, “Are Happiness and Life Satisfaction Different Across Religious Groups? Exploring determinants of Happiness and Life Satisfaction,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57(2018), 6: 2118–2139. Published online 2017 Sept 26; doi: 10.1007/s10943-017-0481-2.

¹⁴ Kenneth S. Zagacki, “Pope John Paul II and the Crusade against Communism: A Case Study in Secular and Sacred Time,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4(2001), 4: 689–690.

same time, he was the active opponent of secularization. He judged that it is destructive and has long-term consequences that modern people cannot evaluate adequately. It is said in Genesis 2:16-17: “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’” Pope John Paul II acknowledged that people are free to choose religion or secularism, but he warns that the choice of secularism is connected with danger.

Dwight Eisenhower, president of the US from 1953-1961, relished the public expression of religion. He encouraged the addition of “under God” to the American Pledge of Allegiance and “In God We Trust” to the national motto in response to the Communist threats of the times. “He noted that the American political tradition required a ‘deeply held Religious Faith.’ Perplexingly he added ‘and I don’t care what it is.’”¹⁵

The right to religious freedom is intrinsic to the Judeo-Christian belief. The root of this belief can be traced to the Bible. Free will is the essential characteristic of God’s creation, and it is the critical element that makes humans to be ‘like’ God. History of the 20th century showed that religious persecutions and attacks on people, based on their religious views can exist in modern society, and their consequences are destructive. It is possible to illustrate this claim with the following excerpt from the Holy Scripture:

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living (Joshua 24:15).

This quote shows that the attacks on secularism are unacceptable in contemporary Catholic discourse. Secularism is the free choice of people, and the Church has no moral right to impose its own views on atheists and agnostics. Even though it might be tempting for religious people to impose their beliefs on others, the Church emphasizes the importance of free choice in the questions of faith. Tolerance is one of the central values that Jesus Christ taught people, as described in the New Testament. Thus, the prolific dialogue is the crucial issue in the popularization of Christian faith.

Pope Benedict XVI writes about the necessity to support the connection between the Church and the secular world in his speech “A time for Chri-

¹⁵ Thomas Kidd, “Religion and American Secularism,” Sept 18, 2018. <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/paradox-american-religion-american-secularism>.

stians to engage with the world.” He describes the necessity of active participation of faithful people of the community in fighting social injustice and poverty. Helping those in need, selfless love, and caring for the most vulnerable members of the society, are indispensable parts of the Christian mission. He writes that pursuing these goals is the common aim that people of all confessions and world views share.¹⁶ In this case, effective communication between the Church and the secular society is the essential element of teamwork to improve the world in which all people live. This idea should become the key assumption in popularization of the Catholic faith in secular American society in the 21st century.

The ideas that Pope Francis expressed in “Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*,” correlate with the teaching of his predecessors. He emphasizes the connection between the Church and the secular world because it is impossible to divide them. Pope Francis comprehends the challenges that the religious community faces during their missionary activity, with the understanding that evangelization is the embodiment of that mission.¹⁷ The fact that society becomes predominantly secular in the United States does not reduce the mission’s importance.

The essence of the Church’s mission is making the synod, the instrument of listening to society and understanding the needs of people. It makes the clergy the guardians of faith who show the congregation how to pursue their Christian mission. Pope Francis describes this idea in the following:

On the contrary, it is a suitable instrument to give voice to the entire People of God, specifically via the Bishops, established by God as “authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church,” demonstrating, from one Assembly to another, that it is an eloquent expression of synodality as a “constitutive element of the Church.”¹⁸

Thus, it allows us to conclude that Pope John Paul, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis emphasized the importance of pursuing the Christian mission in the secular world. According to them, the Catholic Church under-

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, “A time for Christians to engage with the world,” *Vatican.va*, 2012; accessed: February 19, 2021, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121220_financial-times.html.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, “Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*,” *Vatican.va*, 2018; accessed: February 20, 2021, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, “Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*.”

stands the tendencies towards the overall secularization of Western society. This does not mean that there is no need for faith and Church in the modern community. People search for hope, spiritual help in religion, and they often find it in faith. Moreover, the Catholic Church has the opportunity to influence social processes through uniting people, helping those who need assistance, and opposing social and economic injustice in all corners of the world. In other words, the Catholic Church adapts to the ever-changing reality. It manages to adapt to the secularization of contemporary society, although it is a challenging process.

3. THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE DIALOGUE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH AMERICAN SOCIETY SINCE VATICAN II

The Second Vatican Council was the attempt of the Catholic Church to cope with the changing public discourse concerning Christian faith and secularization of Western society. The hierarchy of the Church tried to redefine the meaning of being a Catholic in the contemporary world. Moreover, it was the attempt to regain the position of the Catholic Church in the intellectual debate concerning the questions of culture, morality, social and political issues. In general, the Catholic Church adopted a new perspective of interacting with the modern secularized world. Even though there is much traditionalism in the Catholic canon, it is impossible to disregard changes towards the democratization of religious life that happened after the Council.¹⁹

It is critical to mention the contemporary polarization of thoughts both in social and political spheres. This process started in the 1960s. American society gradually divided into traditionalists or conservatives who supported the old way of living and progressives or liberals who opposed them. Liberal Americans were against the aggressive foreign policy of the United States, the Cold War, interventions of the American army in other countries, racial inequality and segregation. They supported feminism and the rights of ethnic minorities. These liberal ideologies became political realities. These realities then became examples of ethical behavior in the modern world. As a result, the dominant cultural perspective in modern America is a liberal one.²⁰ The

¹⁹ Todd Scribner, *A partisan Church: American Catholicism and the rise of neoconservative Catholics* (Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 1.

²⁰ Scribner, *A partisan Church*, 2.

negative point in this case is that the Catholic Church is associated with traditionalists due to its permanent basis. The majority of people continue thinking about it in this context. In other words, a significant number of people do not associate the Catholic faith with liberal tendencies and do not regard it as an opportunity for themselves.

F.M. Requena writes about the Impact of the Second Vatican Council on the American Catholic Church, claiming that the American religious discourse is unique. The main issue is that the history of the Catholic Church in the United States is comparatively short. Moreover, American Catholics are fewer and less represented in public life than Protestants who constitute most of Christians in the country. These two aspects lead to the situation that the doctrine of Catholic Church is associated with traditionalism, stability, and opposition to innovations in all spheres of public life, including relationships between people, attitudes to the most biased topics like homosexuality and abortion.²¹ Plainly, opposition to these social stances make Catholicism unpopular among younger generations who hesitate about the choice of their religion versus their secularist views.

F.M. Requena articulated the most challenging issues that the Catholic Church had to solve after the Second Vatican Council. It is possible to illustrate this perspective with the following list:

- 1) a failure to respond to the questions in which the Catholics of the day were interested; 2) its predominantly confessional character—rigorous and academic in tone—but lacking significant contributions to American intellectual and social history; 3) the limitation of serious academic study of Catholic history to only a few universities; 4) the predominant emphasis on Catholicism's juridical and institutional character with scarce attention given to the laity; 5) the absence of Catholicism from the national historical narrative; 6) the predominance of the paradigm of “Americanization”; and 7) an emphasis on the “minority” mentality to describe the development of American Catholicism.²²

The above excerpt demonstrates that the Catholic Church understood that it could not satisfy the needs of the majority of people. The Christian doctrine did not feature an explanation of how the faithful should react to the contemporary intellectual agenda. The ideology of secularism, provided people

²¹ Federico M. Requena, “The Impact of the Second Vatican Council on United States Catholic Historiography,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 33(2015), 2: 105.

²² Requena, “The Impact of the Second Vatican Council,” 111-112.

with the answers to socially important questions like social justice, political and civil rights activism.

R. Inglehart and W.E. Baker support the idea that previously mentioned scholars articulated the opposition of traditional Catholic world view and modernity with its secularism. The Catholic doctrine was not initially created to correspond to the needs of the industrialized society. It does not initially agree with modern perception of gender roles, and the Catholic Church had to adapt to contemporary reality. Industrial society created many negative things, including the exploitation of the working class, the exacerbation of the squalor of the poor, and the decay of morality that led to the increased crime rates. If the Catholic Church would emphasize the negative consequences of modernization, proposing positive and practical solutions to these problems and alternative outcomes, the number of faithful might increase significantly.²³

Thus, it shows that working on the improvement of negative consequences of modernization can become the effective means of popularizing the Catholic faith. The secular world view is not the ideal solution that satisfies all needs of modern American society. The Church can adapt to the new social, cultural and economic context. However, it can still promote the values of traditional morality that aim at helping people to live in harmony with themselves, with the surrounding world, and with God.

G.B. Agee focuses on racial equality and the attitude of the Catholic Church to this question. The Catholic Church tried to achieve racial equality among its congregation even in the 19th century. The inclusion of African American faithful in the Catholic Church was among the priorities that the clergy set when the Vatican decided to popularize Catholicism on the new continent. The Church foregrounded the ideas of racial equality of all Christians in the face of God with quotes from the Bible and from the texts of saints, including St. Augustine. In other words, the theological justification of racial equality was widespread even before the modern era with a liberal and secular world view. These ideas were both innovative and progressive for that time in American society where African Americans were segregated from the white majority.²⁴

The emphasis on these historical facts might become an effective way of popularizing the Catholic Church in contemporary American society. It shows

²³ Ronald Inglehart, and Baker Wayne E., "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values," *American Sociological Review* 65(2000), 1: 20.

²⁴ Gary B. Agee, "Racial Equality, Catholicism, and the Third Colored Catholic Congress." *Pennsylvania Legacies* 15(2015), 2: 21.

that the Catholic Church can propose modern people adequate solutions to existing problems associated with questions of race and inequality connected with it. The majority of people do not know about such facts from the history of the Catholic Church. They believe that it is traditional and thus intolerant, which is the obvious mistake because of their ignorance of Church history. Therefore, the Catholic Church needs to popularize information about its history, showing modern people that its doctrine and views apply to contemporary American reality and existing social problems.

S.D. Williams writes that the Catholic Church has an active position concerning the Black Lives Matter movement. According to the statistics, twenty-five percent of all Catholics are black, which means that racial equality is among the top priorities that the Church has in the modern world. It makes the engagement of the Catholic Church with radical movements for racial justice against discrimination, based on the color of skin quite logical. The recent events in the United States support this claim. The researcher emphasizes the idea that the participation of the Catholic Church in the Black Lives Matter movement is not the rise against white people; it is the movement against the supremacist ideas that one race is better than another. It is also the movement for freedom and justice that are absolutely Christian values that the Catholic Church promotes. In fact, it is easy to illustrate this idea with the passages from the Bible, which means that it is a purely Christian idea that modern people in the secular world tend to forget.²⁵

The interesting fact is that the lower rank of the Catholic Church leadership, including students at theological colleges, local priests, Sisters of Mercy, participated in the Black Lives Matter movement actively. Higher authorities remained silent for a long time. These facts show that the Catholic community is ready to react to the challenges that modern society proposes. They are willing to have, to serve the community and to improve life in the society, which is part of their Christian mission.²⁶

At the same time, this example shows that higher authorities of the Catholic Church react slowly to the changes in the society. They tend to be conformists, as the researcher writes. According to the perspective articulated by Williams, the Catholic Church did nothing to oppose racial injustice in the United States for several centuries. It supported colonialism and enslavement

²⁵ Shannen Dee Williams, "The Global Catholic Church and the Radical Possibilities of #BlackLivesMatter," *Journal of Africana Religions* 3(2015), 4: 503.

²⁶ Williams, "The Global Catholic Church," 504.

in previous centuries. It blessed European politicians of the past who decided to conquer other countries.²⁷ These facts are well-known to most people, which makes them feel disillusioned when they think about the Catholic Church. It is critical for the modern Church to emphasize its truly Christian values that include the desire for justice for all individuals. The image of the Catholic Church would become more positive among young Americans. Moreover, the Catholic Church changed much during the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Still, most people do not know vital details about these processes. It is possible to illustrate these ideas about the Catholic Church and the modern American racial agenda with the following lines from the article by Williams:

Although the tenets of #BlackLivesMatter aligns perfectly with Catholic social teaching, much of the Church remains unmoved by the escalating rates of police militarization and state and vigilante violence against Black communities throughout the world. It remains to be seen whether the Church will be one of the movement's biggest supporters or one of its foes. Indeed, embracing "Black Lives Matter" will require the Church to come to terms with its own enduring investments in European and white supremacy.²⁸

Thus, this passage shows that the historical heritage of the Catholic Church has many racist details. It is critical for the Church to show people that Catholic history has anti-racist stories, and its doctrine does not support racial injustice and inequality nowadays. Its views correlate with the liberal secular position, as the Black Lives Matter movement showed. The main problem is that most people do not know about it, because the Church does not talk about it in the public sphere, including mass media and social media resources.

Another example that supports the movement of the Catholic Church towards liberalization is the attitude toward women. M.E. Hunt writes that lay women's active participation in the life of the Church started to appear in the 1950s. Allowing for this participation demonstrated that the hierarchy of the establishment of the Catholic Church was open to new ideas. With time, their number increased, and the attitude of the Catholic Church towards women and gender roles is comparatively liberal. These changes, though small, demonstrate that the Church could evolve with society and adapt to the needs of the time.²⁹

²⁷ Williams, "The Global Catholic Church," 505.

²⁸ Williams, "The Global Catholic Church," 510.

²⁹ Mary E. Hunt, "Women-Church: Feminist Concept, Religious Commitment, Women's Movement," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25(2009), 1: 86.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the Catholic Church can adapt to the changing reality of modern society. The modern Western world in general, and especially American society, are predominantly secular. People associate secularism with modernity that is opposed to the traditionalist faith in God. It is critical for the Catholic Church to understand social, cultural, and political tendencies that determine the events in the modern world. It is the way to understand the spiritual needs of people by understanding the means of providing them with the assistance they lack. Moreover, it is critical for the modern Catholic Church to describe its activity positively in the media because many people have a stereotypical perception of faith and religion. The above reflections illustrate the willingness and openness of the Catholic Church to adapt to the changing reality of modern society. Faith is not a path of restrictions but opportunities. Participation in religious communities, like the Catholic Church, offer an opportunity to understand the meaning of one's own life.

Ultimately for the Catholic Church to thrive in the US it must engage the symbiotic nature of its own existence: a foundation of the Divine—Christ himself, a structure built by inspired yet human hands, a muse that is broken yet remains the Father's creation still worthy of salvation. Secularism is not separate from the human experience. Secularism is intrinsic to humanity's nature. The American founders understood this. They understood that humans must be free to choose to engage with the Divine in whatever form they see. By including this freedom of choice directly into the founding documents of America, they offered protection to this free will, but also protection to choose to follow the Divine. The paradoxical relationship of the Church in America is plain — secularism allows it to exist in a pluralistic society, yet the free will of humanity also thrives. It is the responsibility of the Catholic Church to demonstrate its relevance to this generation. Grace builds on nature. The foundation was laid. We must build.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aee, Gary B. "Racial Equality, Catholicism, and the Third Colored Catholic Congress," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 15(2015), 2: 18–25.
- Casanova, José. "The Secular and Secularisms," *Social Research* 76(2009), 4: 1049–66.
- Frey, Jennifer A. "Like Amy Coney Barrett, I'm a professional woman criticized from my big, Catholic Family." *USA Today*. Published Oct 15, 2020. [USAToday.com](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2020/10/15/amy-coney-barrett-catholic-family/20201015)

- Hunt, Mary E. "Women-Church: Feminist Concept, Religious Commitment, Women's Movement," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25(2009), 1: 85–98.
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Wayne E. Baker. "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values," *American Sociological Review* 65(2000), 1: 19–51.
- Montefiore, Hugh. *Reclaiming the High Ground: A Christian Response to Secularism*. Palgrave: Macmillan UK, London: Borough of Camden, 1990.
- Pope Benedict XVI. "A time for Christians to engage with the world." *Vatican.va*, 2012. Accessed February 19, 2021. http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121220_financihttpal-times.html.
- Pope Francis. "Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio*." *Vatican.va*, 2018. Accessed February 20, 2021. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html.
- Requena, Federico M. "The Impact of the Second Vatican Council on United States Catholic Historiography." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 33(2015), 2: 103–32.
- Scribner, Todd. *A partisan Church: American Catholicism and the rise of neoconservative Catholics*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015.
- Spitzer, Robert J. "Confronting Secularism Today." *United States Conference for Catholic Bishops*, 2021. Accessed February 23, 2021. <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/enlisting-witnesses/confronting-secularism-today>.
- Święś, Kazimierz. "Sekularyzacja." In *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, edited by Ryszard Kamiński, Wiesław Przygoda, Marek Fiałkowski, 785–88. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2006.
- Williams, Shannen Dee. "The Global Catholic Church and the Radical Possibilities of #BlackLivesMatter." *Journal of Africana Religions* 3(2015), 4: 503–15.
- Zagacki, Kenneth S. "Pope John Paul II and the Crusade against Communism: A Case Study in Secular and Sacred Time," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4(2001), 4: 689–710.

SEKULARYZM JAKO WYZWANIE DLA KOŚCIOŁA KATOLICKIEGO W STANACH ZJEDNOCZONYCH AMERYKI W XXI WIEKU

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Sekularyzm, rozumiany jako świeckość, jest fundamentalną zasadą Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki. Historycznie rzecz biorąc, Amerykanie postrzegali sekularyzm jako środek ochrony wolności wyznania swoich obywateli przed religią lub agnostycyzmem narzucanym odgórnie przez państwo. Amerykański Kościół katolicki w XXI wieku szanuje rozdział Kościoła i państwa, ponieważ stoi na straży zasady wolności religijnej. Współczesny agresywny sekularyzm staje się jednak wyzwaniem dla Kościoła, gdyż coraz bardziej utrudnia realizację jego misji w świecie. Sekularyzm jest także wyzwaniem dla teologii pastoralnej, której zadaniem jest tworzenie modeli działalności duszpasterskiej dostosowanych do warunków konkretnego miejsca i czasu. Tak więc problem tego opracowania można wyrazić w pytaniu: jak postrzegany jest sekularyzm w Stanach Zjednoczonych, jakie wyzwania stawia przed Kościołem katolickim w XXI wieku oraz jak Kościół ma wypełniać swoją misję w społeczeństwie amerykańskim? Odpowiedź na powyższe pytanie zostanie udzielona na podstawie analizy treści dokumentów

Kościół powszechny i Kościół w Stanach Zjednoczonych oraz przeglądu adekwatnych publikacji amerykańskich teologów i socjologów.

Autor artykułu dokonuje przeglądu historycznego, kulturowego i eklezjalnego rozumienia sekularyzmu w Stanach Zjednoczonych jako ideologii i porównuje je z nowoczesnym rozumieniem sekularyzmu w odniesieniu do organizacji społeczeństwa amerykańskiego. Ponadto ocenia wpływ sekularyzmu, jako ideologii i nadrzędnej zasady organizacji życia społecznego, na współczesny kształt Kościoła katolickiego w USA, a także jego rolę w społeczeństwie amerykańskim. Ukazuje życiową i moralną potrzebę Kościoła, aktualność jego misji poprzez ewangelizację i stałe zabieranie głosu w kwestiach sprawiedliwości społecznej w społeczeństwie amerykańskim, pomimo jego statusu mniejszościowego oraz negatywnego wpływu na opinię publiczną ostatnich skandali w szeregach duchowieństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: sekularyzm; Kościół katolicki; XXI wiek; relatywizm; wolność wyznania; rozdział Kościoła i państwa.