

# The Secularization Project

## Survey #4 Results collated 29 August 2021

Please find the results of the fourth survey of The Secularization Project below. The steering committee encourages you to discuss the results with other friars and to consider writing to *Inforum*.

Keep your eyes open for upcoming events in the Project.

### Responses to: **What good do you see in secularization?**

I think that there are potentially many goods, but let me offer two: (1) Secularization is undermining a lot of the privileges that used to be afforded to religious institutions and individuals. This offers us the opportunity to grow in following the poor, chaste, and humble Christ in the spirit of St. Francis. (2) Secularization provides opportunities for us to find common ground with people of other or no religious belief in addressing some of the timeless and newer challenges to humanity and our survival.

It's good when it challenges the way we proclaim & live the gospel way of life. It calls us to be more creative in our efforts to understand and minister to the needs of others. Living & working with the poor & vulnerable is key. And getting others on board. We must be different and not blend in but proclaim what's truly valuable while in this world.

At first blush, hearing the question "What good do I see in secularization?" feels a bit like being asked, "What good do I see in a cloudy day?" Insofar as secularization has adopted positive or negative connotations, either within or outside of the ecclesial circles in which we tend to "swim," I suppose the "good" (or lack thereof) discernible in a thing like secularization might be qualifiable and thus written about. But as I seem to see secularization as simply the undeniable reality of the times in which we're living, with no clear-cut genesis, and with no single question or dilemma it poses in need of answering, I guess I tend to look at the issue of secularization a bit like I look at the clouds: Secularization is a thing that's simply "there," and I could shake my fist at it all I wanted and it would never go away; likewise, I could mistakenly turn it into an object of my worship, but I'd be wrong if I did. Secularization is a "guest" of my times, and I'll live with it whether I want to or not.

If there's "good" to be found in secularization (and I won't deny there is) then the good will have to be found "within me", inasmuch as I become a reaction to the world around me, which is becoming more and more secularized. In this way, the "good" isn't found in or by secularization, but in the stances I adopt in positioning myself within a secularized milieu. I can do this as a saint would -- with an air of "holy detachment" -- or I can do it in some other way, perhaps by trying to wrest

control over a world over which I possess no dominion or control, growing tired, anxious and browbeaten by my (failed) exertions.

A secularized culture, I think, can help me to question and re-analyze a thing like "love." I know this because the world around me, even within religious life, is demanding this of me. I can love a person for the "good" he or she does, but this seems lacking. Instead, I can love the "image of God" indelibly stamped in every person, whether they choose to reflect, grow in or magnify that image or not. A secularized culture, as its name suggests, tends to define itself by a collective choice "not" to magnify the image of God; but by that alone, I have no right to withhold my love from my neighbor, no matter how far from God I may assume that person to be (and my assumption may, in fact, be quite wrong).

I suppose if secularization has shown a capacity (thus far) to teach me anything, it's that my duty as a Christian is to love, not for a person's own sake, but for the sake of the image of God within him or her. This was always true, of course; there is never, in fact, a cultural milieu in which my responsibility to love is any more (or any less) demanded of me. Secularized or not (and a secularized culture can draw this out of me more than a religious one can, insofar as a secularized milieu requires me to "think through" this action when it might otherwise seem to come more naturally or easily), the culture can remind me "why" I am a Christian (or why I "choose" to be a Christian), and "what" that self-identification requires of me, in real, moral terms.

This was way over 100 words, and was a bit rambling and probably a little incoherent; my apologies to all! But it was the best answer I could give.

The good that I see in secularization is the value of difference and the uniqueness of each human being. Human beings are different from one another, and each person has a own way of thinking and doing things. Secularization allows individual to express their uniqueness without the consequence of the outcast or being judge.

For me the word I see in the experience of secularization is OPPORTUNITY. We have another chance to engage our society with the truth of the Gospel. We can look at the advances in science and technology as a way to gain insight into how God has done so many wonderful things for us throughout the centuries. Instead of finding a divide between the acts of God and the acts of human reason, we begin to see a bridge of understanding. We can state what we are for, what values motivate us to throw in our lot with the God of the universe who loves each of us so much.

Paying attention to our own charisms and being attentive to the needs of society can provide the possibility of a twofold dialogue about the ways that we can respond to the needs evident in the wider society, and how our gifts, our history, and our values can be of assistance to the wider community. It also offers the possibility of tempering or

transforming practices in the wider society that contribute to attitudes not helpful in promoting respect and acceptance.

It can demythologize some "traditions" and help us face reality and truth more directly.

Secularization has freed society from faith-based tyranny, especially in the area of sexuality and marriage. The church's own teaching on following the sense of the faithful easily is compromised by authoritarian stances inhibiting change and new understandings, including those proposed by reason, science, biology, medicine, etc. Secularization allows us to look at our faith with new eyes that had been previously forcefully closed. The human element of the church needs its power questioned as much as any human power. Secularization assists that. Secularization also helps overcome faith-based violence, war, demagoguery, intolerance, etc. Peace in many parts of the world is impossible without a political secularization.

Secularization has enlightened us on what it means to be human in terms of human dignity, equality, basic freedoms, needs, human freedom and potential. Governments and Church have tried for too long to suppress these values.

Secularization should not be considered in isolation. My question is: How to preach the Good News of Jesus to a culture that has forgotten God, and has been infected by negativity, racism and violence. How do we as ministers of the Gospel respond to this reality?

The United States contains high levels of religion, education, culture and politics which operate within a secular paradigm. Did you ever notice how many of our presidential candidates discuss their faith because many draw a connection between religion and morality? Christmas is commercialized but not under siege. The sixty-four-million-dollar question is, will religion survive secularization? Many religious people have been pushed into beliefs and positions they feel uncomfortable with. Formerly, religious people turned to Scripture as an excuse for racism, but now very few would accept that religious belief as an excuse. Secular and profane things can become positive through secularization as long as religious activities are given free exercise. The wave of secularism will leave many believers in good shape because it adapts to current conditions. Will the Church arise victorious from the ashes of secularism is another penetrating question?

It challenges us as a Church to move from medieval views of the laity as simply actors that we dictate things to, to active and thinking members of the Body of Christ who are capable of also discerning the Gospel call. It moves us as a Church out from feeling privileged to a more primitive role of convincing others by our lived faith.

Enlightened missiology asks, "Where is God at work here?" rather than beginning from the premise "We have to bring God (or the Gospel or Jesus) to these people. Let's say

secularization creates lots of channels of expression (not just hymns, for example, but a culture rich in songs, musicals, operas), missionaries and evangelizers have that many more avenues to take into a culture in attempts to share Gospel values. Beginning in a culture that is post-metaphysical is a more challenging starting point in some ways, but not all.

The growth in science, justice, and other social awarenesses can challenge the church to renew her spiritual life, to learn more about her place, and the place of all human beings in the God's creation. It pushes us to a new understanding of and welcoming of the other and can renew our personal spiritual lives as individuals created as we are for the good of the Kingdom.

As we see the growth of secularism in our society, I believe that it forces the hand of 'lukewarm' Catholics. People have to truly question the importance of their faith. If it is something they value, they will stay and be committed to living out the faith in its fullness. If it is not worth the effort, in their eyes, they will leave. In the end, I believe that we will be left with a smaller, but more dedicated Church. This reality in itself gives me hope for renewal.

The good of secularization can be seen within how it can at times help bring accountability to institutions (like the RCC) that through the centuries became too corrupted by its own power and influence, such as with its global sex abuse scandal. Thus, secularization is not itself immune to the same shadows as the church, but something outside the church is needed to help keep it accountable to the common good of all.

As a preacher, Secularization is the challenge to experience and proclaim the Divine in new ways and through new traditions. While the US church has changed in relationship to society, *Ad Gentes* challenges The Missionary Church to continue to make God present, even as circumstances change. (Section 6)

Secularization, when seen as a social phenomenon in relationship to faith and philosophy, calls me to learn and adapt as the "mystical body of Christ unceasingly gathers and directs its forces toward its own growth."