

 <p>FAKULTA FILOZOFICKÁ ZÁPADOČESKÉ UNIVERZITY V PLZNI</p> <p>Katedra filozofie</p>	<p>PROTOKOL O HODNOCENÍ PRÁCE</p>
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Práce (co se nehodí, škrtněte): diplomová / ~~bakalářská~~

Posudek (co se nehodí, škrtněte): ~~vedoucího~~ / oponenta

Práci hodnotil: Petr Pavlas

Práci předložil: Emmanuel Okwudilichukwu Onuma

Název: Religion and Secularism in Europe according to Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI: A Lesson for Nigeria

1. CÍL PRÁCE (uved'te, do jaké míry byl naplněn):

Although the title of the thesis is slightly confusing (its wording evokes that the work would focus exclusively on analysing, contextualising and interpreting Joseph Ratzinger's thoughts on secularisation), the course of the author's argument is well conceived and excellently accomplished. The objective of the thesis is formulated in „General Introduction“ (pp. 5–7) as follows: “This work will look at how he [Joseph Ratzinger] considers the secularisation of and eventually the secular Europe with regards to its Christian root, its current identity devoid of the Christian past and what the future possibly holds for a secularised Europe.” To reach the main goal, the author has decided first to “have a look at the meaning of secularism and secularisation” synchronically, i.e. what does the term presently mean according to some relevant general authorities, aptly and representatively chosen as far as I can judge: Encyclopaedia Britannica, National Secular Society of the UK, Cambridge Dictionary, Pontifical Council for Culture, Angelo Amato SDB, Tony Walter, Ian Hunter, etc.

After a conceptualization of the topic and a terminological clarification (pp. 8–17), a “European story” (pp. 18–26) and a “Czech story” (pp. 27–36) of secularisation are presented. What is – according to the title – considered to be a core of the thesis is developed in the following 5th chapter (pp. 37–48), to be supplemented by “Evaluation and a Nigerian situation” (pp. 49–68) as the most fascinating and contributing part of the work.

The ambition of the work has been fulfilled in an original way and I have learned much from reading it. It absolutely keeps up the requirements imposed to *magister artium* (i.e. master – Mgr.) qualification level. Still, to be a full-fledged scholarly work, the issues described below would be worthy of consideration on the author's part for a future research & academic writing in this or other field.

2. OBSAHOVÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (náročnost, tvůrčí přístup, proporcionalita teoretické a vlastní práce, vhodnost příloh apod.):

The chosen topic is not an easy one and the author managed to deal with it originally and successfully. His point of view is that of a Catholic priest of Nigerian origin and education, and the reading is therefore very beneficial from the European, especially Czech perspective. His approach is openly that of an insider: more “emic” than “etic” (anthropologically speaking), “engagé”, which is not a shortcoming in this case.

Still, I have reservations about some assumptions presented in the thesis:

(1) The author defines secularism as “transition from the sacred understanding of the world and its principles, including the common things around us, to a desecralised understanding of state, power and governance especially” (p. 8). But that is a much weaker conception than is usual: the mentioned desacralisation implies not only politics (a freedom from theocracy), but most of all a shared naturalist (post-Cartesian and empiricist) epistemology, frequently – but not necessarily – resulting in ontological naturalism and materialism. Social scientists and philosophers distinguish between the more general concepts of “secularisation” (a process) and “secularism” (an ideology) on the one hand, and the concept of the “secular state” on the other hand. It seems to me that the author confuses, from time to time, both concepts.

(2) The author laconically paraphrases Tony Walter that “to be Catholic is to be Irish (or Polish) and democratic” (p. 16). I have not checked up the original wording, but this is obviously not true. The logical subject and the first part of the logical predicate have to be swapped: “to be Irish (or Polish) means to be Catholic and democratic”.

(3) The author makes a few inaccurate assertions about the Czech and European history. He claims, for instance: “Scholars such as Jiří Novotný have noted that in the Czech lands, the earliest sources of Christian religion in the 9th century can be traced from indirect testimonies and preserved artefacts” (p. 27). Again, I have not checked up the original wording, but the 9th century is the time of St. Constantine and St. Methodius, and there is extant much more than “indirect testimonies and preserved artefacts” about Christianity in the Czech lands at that time. The author probably means the region of “Bohemia”, where the christianization was happening later. Analogically, when the author says that “Czech Republic witnessed a gradual and eventual movement from the monastery and church controlled schools of the 12th and 13th centuries down to the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1773” (p. 34), what he is trying to speak about are in all probability the “Lands of the Bohemian Crown (*Corona regni Bohemiae*)”. When the author says that the “final disintegration of the Roman Empire came in the 17th century with the French Revolution” (p. 44), he intended to say the “18th century”, the very end of the 18th century to be more precise. To say that Europe lost the Second World War – cf. p. 45: “[...] with Europe losing the war [...]” – is a clear misunderstanding: Europe definitely suffered a loss (in terms of international-political and economical power), but definitely did not lose the war.

Contrariwise, what I find extremely stimulating and highly plausible is the author’s point that no permanent increase of religiosity occurred in the Czechoslovak and later Czech Republic after 1989 because “the Christian church failed to provide for the immediate and concrete human need of the people”, i.e. the material needs. “Since the clergy (here representing the structure of the institutionalised religion) have failed in bringing to bare the material expectations of religion, they are to suffer not only the loss of the privileges but are made to pay in one way or the other for those already enjoyed, which in the first place they never deserved” (p. 31–32).

3. FORMÁLNÍ ÚPRAVA (jazykový projev, správnost citace a odkazů na literaturu, grafická úprava, přehlednost členění kapitol, kvalita tabulek, grafů a příloh apod.):

Language of the work is well understandable, although it is not a “high English” style typical of academic publications; especially the use of English vocabulary is not always fully appropriate. The format of references and citations is correct and the work as a whole is well structured and visually nice. The thesis is not furnished with any attachments; the nature of the work does not require them. It is a pity, however, that the quality of the Czech “resumé” is poor (a proofreading or editing by a competent native speaker before the submission of the thesis could prevent that).

4. STRUČNÝ KOMENTÁŘ HODNOTITELE (celkový dojem z práce, silné a slabé stránky, originalita myšlenek apod.):

The author’s interpretation is self-standing and original while using at the same time sources from a broad segment of scholarly authorities: Ian Barbour, Peter Berger, Max Weber, Paul Gifford, Talcott Parsons, Dušan Lužný – to name just a few. The result is a real success. The choice of interweaving authoritative academic studies with popular articles and blogs is methodologically legitimate and even appropriate to study the subject in question; however, an introductory account for this mix is lacking. The issue of a completely missing methodological reflection of author’s own advance – both in his research and in the way of exposition – is perhaps the most serious shortcoming of the work. For all that, I must repeat, I consider the result of the author’s obviously hard work on the theme extremely good and valuable.

5. OTÁZKY A PŘIPOMÍNKY DOPORUČENÉ K BLIŽŠÍMU VYSVĚTLENÍ PŘI OBHAJOBĚ (jedna až tři):

(1) You say: “Secularisation has taken root due to the enthronement of rationality and the dethronement of religious beliefs as the guiding principles of the society” (p. 18). Do you think that rationality is contrary or even contradictory to religious belief? If not, and if it is true that *fides et ratio* are mutually complementary and harmonious as the Catholic church teaches, how is it possible for rationality to “dethrone” religious belief? Moreover, why do you – in your fourfold concept of man as a political, social, religious, and cultural animal (p. 58) – hold back the famous Aristotelian definition of man as a rational animal (*animal rationale*)?

(2) You say: “In biomedicine and biotechnology, as in economics and politics, science that is divorced from ethics permits man to dispose of life and other human beings, particularly the most vulnerable and defenceless, with impunity (p. 20, cf. also p. 69).” How do you understand the relationship between science and ethics? Are ethical prescriptions/imperatives rationally demonstrable? Is a “secular ethics” possible? (There are many ethical theories which would make evidence of it, e.g. utilitarianism.) Do you agree with David Hume’s thesis, the “naturalistic fallacy”, that what there is (the matters of fact) cannot say anything to what there should be (morals)?

6. NAVRHOVANÁ ZNÁMKA (výborně, velmi dobře, dobře, nevyhově):

Considering the author’s careful work, original approach and obvious enthusiasm about the topic, I suggest – in spite of my critical remarks – rating “Výborně” (Excellent).