



VALUES AND THE FUTURE RELIGION, KNOWLEDGE, IDEOLOGY AND COMMON RESPONSIBILITIES

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Values may be defined as a collection of ideas and concepts that determine the acceptability or unacceptability of a person's behaviour and goals. Groups, individuals and societies vary according to their respective value orientations, and these in turn help define their attitudes and sense of accountability.

Today globalisation is affecting every part of the world and imposing a single global culture on it. Generally speaking, this is the culture of the “dominant peoples”, which tries to foist its hegemony upon the national cultures of the Third World. However, traditional social values and value systems are standing firm in resisting its attempts and remain attached to their faith-based roots and absolutes as they seek to win respect for the principles of cultural “exceptionalism” and “cultural relativism”.

Here in the Arab-Islamic world religion is the fortress that safeguards values and identity and

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reinforces our sense of common responsibility for developing and tending the earth in accordance with Allah’s Law, while at the same time calling upon us to earn an honest living.

One: basic concepts

Before embarking on the main theme of our discussion – values and the future – we need to define a number of pivotal concepts. The first of these is the meaning of the word “values” – a term which, in addition to value systems, encompasses common responsibility (or accountability), ideology, knowledge and religion. We also need to consider modern alternative notions such as secularism, neo-humanism and futurology.

1) Values. The study of values has been an increasingly important aspect of sociology since 1918, when William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki published their study – *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. From that time on, values have been seen as crucial indicators of human behaviour and as key to the understanding of human culture. They have been defined in several different ways – as “things” and “topics”, as attitudes, as consequences of actions or as attitudinal and behavioural indicators, or through direct descriptions of their specific characteristics. Seen from another angle, values have also been regarded as cultural models, subjective trends, criteria and expressions of beliefs.

To put these definitions in a nutshell, values are an expression of the dynamic ideas and concepts – either explicit or implicit – which distinguish an individual or a group by determining what is socially acceptable and by influencing the goals and methods related to a particular course, or courses, of action. Their outward and visible signs can be seen in the attitudes of individuals and groups and their behaviour, beliefs, standards and social symbols. In addition to being intimately linked to society’s other structural components, they also influence them as well as being influenced by them.¹

¹ Kamal al Tabi’iy: *Dirasat fi ‘Ilmi’l Ijtima’i’il Rifi*, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, pp. 55-56. See also by the same author: *Al Ittijahat al Mu’asirah fi Dirasat al Qiyam wa’l Tanmiyah*, 1st impression, Dar al Ma’aref, Cairo, 1985, pp 15-46.

2) The future and futurology. There have been several phases in the way that thinking about the future has developed. In chronological order these include the fanciful, the speculative, the religious, the philosophical and, finally, the scientific. The characteristics of each phase are determined by its circumstances and the way it came about; these include the role of creative thought as a response to human aspirations (which is something that has been common to mankind throughout human history).

The word “future” is the most mystifying and unfathomable word we encounter in our lives and its connotations are understood in numerous different ways. To a powerless person it means “the impossible”, while a coward understands it to mean “the unknown” and to some thinkers it may suggest “the ideal”.¹

This strange disparity between the different ways people see the future could explain the reason why failures occur; i.e. they occur because the future only “happens” to a person or a society when that person or society consciously faces it head-on, while a person who does not face up to the future and consider its implications will always be backward-looking and obscurantist in his or her thinking and fated never to succeed.²

Any exploration of the future is hostage to the past and the present. What I mean by this is that we need to determine our responsibility for what has happened and is happening as well as the direction in which we are going. “Futurology” is a science which deals with events that have not yet occurred and will become present (rather than future) when they do actually occur. Hence the future – which only exists in the mind and the imagination and in the plans we devise for it (which are speculative) – is different from futurology, which deals with the political, economic and social developments which we expect to take place in the future, so that accordingly we draw up plans and strategies for responding to them.³

¹ Kamal al Tabi'iy and Sherif 'Awadh: *'Ilm Ijtima' al Mustaqbal*, Dar al Nasr li'l Nashr wa'l Tawzi', Cairo University, Cairo, 2009, p 67.

² Mohammad Ibrahim Mansur: *Al Ru'iyah al Mustaqbaliyyah li Misr 2030, al Itar al 'Aam*, Information and Decision-Making Support Centre, Future Studies Centre, Council of Ministers, Cairo, 2006.

³ Kamal al Tabi'iy and Sherif 'Awadh: *'Ilm Ijtima' al Mustaqbal*, Dar al Nasr li'l Nashr wa'l Tawzi',

Futurology seeks to study long-term trends in society so that it can develop alternative options for dealing with future events or circumstances and take advantage of available opportunities. It is this academic discipline that produces “future studies” – a process that involves research, knowledge and creative thinking based on observation and perspicacity.

3) Secularisation. This is the process that strips religious beliefs, practices and institutions of their social substance and significance, particularly in modern industrial societies. The decline of religion is measured by levels of participation in, or attendance at, acts of religious worship, as well as adherence to authentic religious beliefs, active support for established religious institutions through membership, financial contributions and general respect, and the importance attached to religious events – such as Eids and festivals – in community life. On the basis of these criteria there is a view which maintains that during the 20th century modern societies became essentially secular.

According to this view, secularisation is an inevitable concomitant of industrial societies and cultural modernisation. Some people even believe that modern science has damaged the credibility of traditional beliefs, while the diversity of different lifestyles and options has broken religion’s monopoly on religious symbols. Moreover, the urbanisation of society has led to the creation of an individualistic world devoid of social or ethical standards, the erosion of family life has made religious institutions less relevant, and technology has enabled people to control their environment to the extent that the notion of an omnipotent god is seen by many as less important, or less plausible, than it was in the past. It is in this sense that secularisation is applied as a yardstick for measuring what Max Weber means by “society’s movement towards rationalisation”.

On the other hand, critics of the “secularisation theory” maintain that it implicitly equates secularisation with the decline of Christianity in traditional societies, while in reality the two should be regarded as separate phenomena. It (i.e. the “secularisation theory”) also underestimates the

Cairo University, Cairo, 2009, p 68.

significance of the new religious movements in societies that are classed as secular and finds it difficult to explain why there are major differences between industrial societies (such as the United States and Britain) in the nature and extent of their secularisation. In addition, they have also failed to consider the role of religion in some national cultures (for example, Poland and Ireland) and they underestimate the significance of secular alternatives to religion (like humanism), which might fulfil the role of religion, though without its spiritual content.

Two: The modern world's universalist value systems

The world today is dominated by an assortment of different value systems, Some of these are derived from the divinely revealed religions such as Islam and Christianity, others have their roots in positivist religions and schools like Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism, while the third source is neither faith-based nor positivist but developed from schools of thought such as neo-humanism. Consequently, each of these systems has its own distinctive characteristics, which we can categorise as follows:¹

1) The first source. The monotheistic faiths. This source encompasses the whole range of sects and schools within the two main divinely revealed religions. The first of these is Christianity and the second is Islam.

These two faiths proclaim the celestial message of the One True God and a belief that they are the sole purveyors of the sole and absolute Truth, and it is almost certainly this that has led to the lasting rivalry between them which continues to this day. In fact, the real antipathy between them became most clearly marked in modern times in the face of the growing trends towards secularism.

In the Christian world the move towards secularisation began with the separation of church and state. Initially it encountered strong resistance,

¹ See Wang Gungwu: *The Future of Secular Values*, National University of Singapore, 2007, pp 2-3.

*Despite Western civilization's secular values, certain of its material achievements make it possible to establish mutual contacts and engage in dialogue with Muslims and others in various parts of the world. This means the essence of Islamic values can be highlighted through direct and indirect interaction using a range of channels such as the telephone, mobile, internet, satellite TV, international conferences, symposiums etc.

but it quickly became accepted, with the result that secular values ultimately became established in all states with a Christian background. In Islam, however, this approach is totally unacceptable – and indeed fundamentally impossible – despite the sustained efforts of individual political leaders, intellectuals and academics who see the modern world as basically secular. Islam is “*din wa dawlah*” (religion and state) and its realm encompasses this world and the next. Under Islam the state’s politics, economy and society in general are under orders to develop and maintain the earth according to Allah’s Shariah. This is the essence of man’s role as Allah’s vicegerent on earth.

Hence the question that arises is: “How can a Muslim be secular without losing his belief in Allah and his Islamic faith?” The answer is highly problematic and raises an endless array of intractable issues. For many people in the Islamic world the quick answer would be that the material benefits of secular values – i.e. modern civilization’s material achievements – should be used to support, protect and propagate the Islamic Faith.

2) The second source. The positivist religions of South Asia, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, which stress the value of inner purity (whether inspired by a multitude of gods and sects – as in Hinduism – or from values inspired by the Buddhist’s ability to detach himself from his reality and rise above it through meditation). Buddhism could be seen as a form of unbelief or heresy, since it does not recognize the existence of a deity or deities; however, its essential goal is “inner peace”, which is from the same source as Hinduism.¹

Here we should perhaps note that these two positivist religions have not led their followers to embrace secularism as a means of solving the world’s problems. At the same time, however, they are still capable of embracing secular values, mainly because they do not see them as a threat to their fundamental religious beliefs.

3) The third source. The secular schools with roots in Ancient Greece and Rome and the East Asia. These have undergone radical changes since

¹ Wang Gungwu: See above p 3.

they were originally conceived. The new version has been led by Western Europe and its “cultural extensions” in the Americas and Australia and – to a greater or lesser degree – it is continuing to extend its influence in East Asia. However there are serious tensions between the two worlds, or cultures (Western and Asian), due to the fact that they have evolved from different sources.

Both these worlds claim that their versions of secularism are universally applicable and that they are inspired by the same spirit of scientific principles and laws that exemplifies the freedom of the individual. However, the Asian model claims that its secularism is a reaffirmation of social morality and social harmony, while it could be said that the spirit of Greece and Rome has lost its way and needs to be born again through the agency of Christian thinkers who will set it on the right path.

These are the sources that determine values at a global level. We can therefore conclude that religion – whether divinely revealed or positivist – has been the basic source of the value system throughout history. And even if “value trends” have parted company with religion from time to time, they have invariably returned to it whether they like it or not, because religion is a natural instinct implanted in us by Allah, and there is no alternative creation to Allah’s creation.

Three: Values, common responsibilities and international organisations

As we have pointed out, values are inseparable from religion and include something usually described as “common responsibility”. This is a concept which has its origins in the human race’s common heritage and embodies the general principle of equality before International Law. The need for this principle can be clearly seen in the historic disparity between the advanced and developing nations in their approach to global environmental problems, as well as in the differences between their economic and technical capabilities when they attempt to tackle them.¹

¹ See *The Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities: Origin and Scope*, World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 26th August 2002, p 1.

In addition to their common responsibilities, there are also important differences between the individual responsibilities incurred by these two types of states.

The principle of common responsibility lies at the core of Islamic ethics. The Holy Qur'an instructs us to co-operate in "righteousness and piety" and to eschew "co-operation in sin and rancour", and it calls upon us to ward off from ourselves and our families "a *Fire* whereof the *fuel is men and stones*". The Prophet's Sunnah also defines common responsibility and calls upon us to concern ourselves with the Muslims' situation, as in the following Hadiths – "The one who does not concern himself (or herself) with the Muslims' situation is not one of them", and "Love your brother as you love yourself". The most comprehensive statement on the subject is the Qur'an's declaration that "the Believers are brothers, so make peace (or settlement) between your brothers".

Different societies around the world and regional and international organisations have sought to crystallise the concept of "common responsibility". Symposia have been held on the subject with contributions from experts in a range of disciplines, with the aim of determining how it can be applied in practice in such fields as health, education, the environment, energy, resources, combating poverty, social security, human development, etc.

In this connection, the Rio Declaration on environmental degradation, issued in August 2002, raises the notion of "common but differentiated responsibilities" as a universally binding principle. At the International Summit on Sustainable Development the advanced states readily agreed to assume their responsibilities in view of the threats to the world environment posed by their own populations, by adopting the appropriate advanced technologies and providing the necessary funding for them.¹

The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" comprises two basic elements:

¹ *Ibid.* p 2, and *Shared Values, Shared Responsibilities*, G8 Africa Joint Declaration, G8 Summit of Deauville, May 26th-27th 2011, p 7.

1) The state's common responsibility to protect the environment (for example), or to protect part of it, at the national, regional and international levels.

2) The need to take into account the specific circumstances of each state, particularly the part it has played in aggravating a particular problem, as well as its ability to resolve it, reduce the threat it poses or bring it under control.

This principle leads to at least two consequences which may be expressed in practical terms as follows:

1) Asking all relevant states to participate in an assessment of their role in the international response to environmental problems. This would enable the part played by each individual state to be highlighted, while identifying urgent problems and ways of resolving them, and at the same time helping to ensure that similar problems do not arise in the future.

2) Imposing obligatory environmental targets on states.

The concept of “common responsibility” is similar and is used to describe the shared commitments or obligations of two or more states towards protecting a specific environmental resource. Common responsibility can come into play when a shared resource is involved which is subject to a common legal authority, rather than being controlled exclusively by any one state or sovereign power. (An example of this is biodiversity, which is of common concern to all humanity.)¹

China is at the forefront of the international community where the concept of “common responsibility” is concerned. President Hu has stressed the importance of common responsibility and believes that, in order to overcome the major threats to the world of today², the international community should begin by developing the “human element” and instilling a sense of shared accountability. A wave of globalisation has swept across

¹ See *Shared Values, Shared Responsibilities*, G8 Africa Joint Declaration, G8 Summit of Deauville, May 26th-27th 2011, pp 2-3.

² *President Hu Emphasises the Theory of Common Responsibility*, Peopledaily.com.cnopinion, p 1. (in English)

the world and the term “global village” has gained traction since the end of the Cold War. The dawn of the new millennium heralded the start of a series of crises and grave challenges that threaten the world as a whole. They include depletion of resources (including energy), global warming, food security, public health issues and economic recession, as well as numerous other problems with the potential to affect world peace and prosperity. This has given rise to a new expression to describe the parlous state of the world – “global risk society” – a reflection of a situation that necessitates international co-operation and common responsibility, as well as a commitment to improve living standards and develop the “human element”. In this connection the Chinese President has proposed a programme to promote common responsibility which comprises the following points:¹

1) Enhanced international co-operation as the only way to deal with global threats and challenges.

2) A commitment by all political parties to the principle of common responsibility. This could be linked to the United Nations organisations and international protocols such as the Kyoto Protocol.

3) The developing countries should face up to their historic responsibilities and fulfil their obligations towards resources and energy, while embracing eco-friendly technology.

4) The advanced countries should stand alongside the developing countries by adopting more constructive economic policies that will contribute to global economic stability, benefit the international finance market, ensure co-operation in overseeing international financial operations and accelerate progress along the world economy’s road to recovery.

5) Co-ordinating the world’s needs and achieving sustainable development. This means serving the interests and needs of both the advanced and developing states with the aim of promoting global economic growth and balanced development. This can only be achieved by developing the Third World.

¹ Ibid. pp 2-4.

6) The Third World countries should join the ranks of the states that are signatories to international agreements on shared responsibility. They should also support growth by implementing structural adaptation policies, in addition to applying energy-saving measures, giving priority to the “circular economy” (an industrial economy that produces no waste or pollution) by espousing new energy and energy-saving industries, boosting economic growth and restructuring their development models.

Religion and the acceptance of “common responsibilities” and “common but differentiated responsibilities” will undoubtedly be helpful in defining roles and obligations, and in promoting the “international division of labour” by assigning each state the part it should play – firstly towards itself, and then towards other states. When rights and obligations are balanced against each other in a global context, this should foster justice, tolerance and equality and reduce feelings of hostility between peoples. These are qualities that the world of today is crying out for.

Four: Religion and values – now and in the future

After the Renaissance, the separation of church and state speeded up the process of “modifying” Christian religious values and they began to give way to secular values. In Islam, on the other hand, the spirit of the Faith is paramount in Islamic values; consequently, any efforts that may be made to modify or replace them are unlikely to succeed. Even so, we find that the West is pulling out all the stops to support those whom it calls the “cultural elite” in the Islamic world in its efforts to Westernise it, spread secular values and refashion Islam’s traditional values. Western advocates of secularisation are calling for the cultural elites in the Islamic world to be given special attention so that they can be groomed to “advance and support the scientific and technological revolution which has changed the face of the world in these times.”¹

Debates are still taking place between the Western and Islamic worlds on the relationship between religion and values, and on the role

¹ For example Wang Gungwu (Op. Cit.) and 5: Louise Antony: *Neo-Humanist Statement of Secular Principles and Values: Personal, Progressive and Planetary*, Paul Kurtz Lecture, 2011, pp 1-5.

of religion in public life, development, planning, politics etc. The most striking thing about these debates is the attempts that are being made (particularly by the West) to exclude religion totally from the picture on the grounds that Europe owes its progress during and after the Renaissance to the separation of religion from politics and the church from the state. However, this position is neither correct in itself nor applicable to every religion. Moreover, it also seeks to separate religion from public life and public affairs, so that it becomes merely a set of rituals that are performed in places of worship and bears no relation to the realities of people's lives. In its place there would be a new "secular religious" system called "secularisation" or "neo-humanism".

These two models of Western Christian thought will show that this position is a sham:

1) Model 1. According to the Christian economist David Pickman: "Much of the economic prosperity achieved by the West since the Second World War has been squandered in a mad, selfish and destructive manner. The West's materialist civilization encourages the pursuit of happiness and a sense of personal worth through possessions, spending and consumption. However, the millions who have been deceived by these false hopes feel disappointed with their lives."¹ Pickman notes that unbridled materialism consumes a lot of human energy and material resources that could otherwise be used to solve the world's problems such as poverty, famine in Africa, the social exclusion of marginalised and powerless people in the Third World, and human habitat destruction.

The affluent classes and advanced countries with a global cultural and historical "reach" – i.e. Western Europe and the United States – feel that they are unable to spend any more time or money on relieving poverty or tackling famines, though they are still able to play games on video machines, peddle arms left, right and centre, ignite conflicts and start wars.

¹ David Pickman and others (in Arabic): *Al Tanmiyah wa'l Qiyam (Development and Values)*, free discussion by leading experts from the World Bank. Tr. Muhsin Yusuf, Maktabat al Usrah, Cairo, 2007, pp 57-58.

It is true that the world's problems are complex and difficult to resolve but, despite their complexity, there is still a role for religion and morality. Our planet's present plight is not basically due to the complexity of our problems; rather, it is because, owing to shortcomings in our upbringing, we have insufficient religious and ethical motivation to channel our energies into actually dealing with the threats our world faces.

In his capacity as an economist at the World Bank and an active Christian, Pickman observes that modern pluralist societies have a tendency to suppress any talk of religion or ethics when discussing public policy. Yet if secularist practices have arisen in those societies as a reaction to the separation of church and state, what one would really expect to see is respect for religious diversity and silence on religious differences, in the interests of coexistence and tolerance between followers of different faiths.¹

However, silence creates problems of another sort. If religion is excluded from economics, politics and social affairs and banished into the wilderness, these areas of public life will find themselves operating in a way that is devoid of ethical principles. Consequently morality and standards will decay, values will disappear and society will become a jungle with no place for the weak, the poor or the sick. This is why there is a growing need for us to recognize the underlying values which are common to the world's cultures and religions; such a recognition will create opportunities for interreligious and intercultural dialogue and help establish a suitable ethical climate for the discussion of issues of general concern.

2) Model 2. Ray Azzopardi wrote a response to Raphael Dingli on 27th June 2011 after the latter had published a study entitled *The Secular Way* in Malta on 9th June 2011. In his study Dingli referred to what he called secular values and stated that “individuals in a secular state have no right to impose their ethical standards upon others.” He also noted: “Malta is a secular state, so consequently religious beliefs have no place in the political process.” He concluded by saying that in this context there are two

¹ Ibid. p 62.

consciences in conflict with each other – the religious conscience and the democratic conscience.¹

Azzopardi was amazed by Dingli’s observations. He pointed out that it was clear that the “ruling religion” in Malta was the Roman Catholic Apostolic Faith, and “Do not the Catholic Church authorities have the right – and indeed the duty – to teach us which principles are right and which are wrong?”

Azzopardi added: “Is not our religion – the Catholic Faith – ingrained in our society and an intrinsic part of our daily lives? Do the teachings of the Church and its beliefs not help us sinners to follow the path that is best for us as human beings and what is for the greater benefit of society? Why should there be a conflict between the religious conscience and the democratic conscience when one of them is guiding us in the direction of good conduct? Must everything be in the name of democracy and guided by it? Should we be free to do whatever we want in the name of democracy? Are right and wrong determined by each individual’s personal way of thinking? Are there not more absolute truths in the message that God sent Jesus to preach on earth, and which the Catholic Church continues to preach? Are secular values to overwhelm religious values in the name of freedom? Aren’t all those people like Mr. Dingli in fact imposing their personal beliefs on the wider community and harassing us in our daily lives in the name of secular values?”

In similar vein, Pope Benedict XVI stated that: “There are some kinds of behaviour and thought which are presented to us as the only reasonable ones and as being more or less applicable to the whole of mankind. [In fact, they are regarded] as being the only acceptable or rational forms [of behaviour and thought].”²

Addressing Western society, which has embraced secular values with enthusiasm, Azzopardi asserted that Christianity today is being subjected

¹ Ray Azzopardi: *Secular Values, Absolute Truths and Modern Trends*, Xemxija, Monday, June 27th 2011, pp 1-2.

² Peter Seewald: *Light of the World*, in Azzopardi Ibid. p 3.

to unbearable pressures and its thinking has been mocked as spurious. Moreover, the debate that took place in Malta on divorce deteriorated into an open attack on the Church, its clergy and its spiritual leaders after they rejected divorce in order to prevent the break-up of the family and safeguard the indissolubility of the marriage bond. From the point of view of their opponents, their position posed a threat to democratic principles.

“Why are Christian values being attacked and mocked?” Azzopardi asked.¹

Azzopardi, who is himself Maltese, believes that the more Malta moves towards secularisation, the greater its need for the teachings of the Catholic Church. Because of man’s natural weakness, human nature, mankind’s constant tendency to stray off the straight and narrow, and the fraudulent notion of freedom which some people are determined to promote, there is a greater need than ever for people to understand and wholeheartedly embrace the absolute truths. The Church wants Malta to remain Catholic, not from “fundamentalist” motives or because it wishes to impose its beliefs upon others, but because what it – the Church – does and what it teaches the people is always beneficial to mankind whatever their beliefs or religious affiliations.

The above two examples reflect the reality of Western societies, particularly their positions on religious and secular values and the relationship between them. They also show that society – any society, however advanced or backward it may be – is unable to do without religious values, since they transcend individual preferences and personal interests, thereby “merging” the individual into the group so that the community becomes the protector and guardian of the individual and the individual becomes committed to the security of the community. Furthermore, religious values also help promote virtue, tolerance and goodwill between communities and peoples.

Islamic societies and Islamic values are different – firstly, because they are still alive and well; secondly, because we have already experienced

¹ See Op. Cit. p 2.

secular values and found them to be undesirably telic – i.e. they serve a particular end in the interests of a specific individual, family or group; and thirdly, because the Islamic value system raises man’s stature as the vicegerent of Allah the Most High upon earth, and gives unlimited authority to develop the earth according to the Way of Allah. Even if there are glaring mistakes in the way man exercises that authority, do not blame Islamic values; blame the Muslims who made those mistakes.

Five: Ideology, knowledge and common responsibility

The term “ideology” is used to convey the concepts of shared belief systems, absolute values and prevailing culture. Theorists believe that ideology is the cornerstone of the social system in advanced capitalist societies.¹ The term was originally coined by Karl Marx, who used it to describe the social phenomenon of ideas and culture in general, and political ideas and political culture in particular, as well as the relationship between the field of ideas and other political and economic fields. These topics were debated by the followers of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim and the structuralists, and have had a significant influence on Marxist theories on the concept of ideology.²

Marx explained the nature of the relationship between ideas and economics and stated that the ideas of the ruling class were bound to become the dominant ideas. From an ideological perspective, ideas may be seen as the driving force of history, though Marx asserted that the class struggle was the driving force of history and that there is a constant tension, or dialectic, between basis and superstructure.

Knowledge – in the sense that we are referring to it here – may be described as “commonsense knowledge”; that is to say, as the routine knowledge that we acquire in our daily lives and which determines the nature and manner of our activities. Anthromethodologists call

1 Gordon Marshall (in Arabic): *Mawsu’at ‘Ilm al Ijtima’ (Encyclopaedia of Sociology)*, Vol. 2, Tr. Mohammed al Jawhari and others, Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, 2000, p 1118.

2 Gordon Marshall (in Arabic): *Mawsu’at ‘Ilm al Ijtima’*, Vol. 1, Tr. Mohammed al Jawhari and others, Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, 2000, pp 252-253.

commonsense knowledge “implicit knowledge” – a reference to the fact that, in carrying out their daily activities, individuals depend upon implicit rules which determine how they should act in any given situation, which creates a sense of “logical organisation and interconnection”.¹

Proponents of “symbolic interaction” state that sociology needs to focus on interpreting people’s concepts of the social world and that sociological analysis should be based on those concepts.

In recent times knowledge has become a much broader field than it used to be, particularly with the development of information technology, which is drowning the world in a sea of data and detailed facts about everything imaginable. Globalisation – including satellite TV channels and the internet – is helping to spread information, expand social interaction and generally increase man’s store of knowledge, and this is having an effect on his behaviour, the decisions he makes, and his daily life as a whole. It may well be that some aspects of the Arab Spring revolutions are an echo of this phenomenon.

Common responsibility – as we pointed out earlier – is a bilateral or multilateral reciprocal commitment to perform a particular action in which the role of each party is specified as well as the way in which it should be performed.² It is mainly a legal concept because it involves a shared legal interest and it is frequently used in connection with the world’s “hot” issues, such as poverty, social exclusion, backwardness, environmental pollution, the scarcity of resources and energy sources, desertification, climate change, terrorism, piracy, etc.

Ideology may be defined as ideas that direct a course of behaviour; knowledge provides us with the implicit rules that determine how we should behave; and common responsibility calls upon us to be considerate of others, recognize their right to life, act fairly towards them and balance our rights against our obligations. This “ideational triangle” (ideology,

¹ Gordon Marshall (in Arabic): *Mawsu'at 'Ilm al Ijtima'*, Vol. 3, Tr. Mohammed al Jawhari and others, Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, 2001, pp 1373-1374.

² *The Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities*, Op. Cit. p 2.

knowledge and common responsibility) has the capacity to lead the world along the road to peace, development and security. It can help resolve the problems of poverty and hunger in the Third World, eradicate hatred from the hearts of oppressed and suffering peoples, spread goodwill and generate a spirit of universal tolerance.

However, is the world moving in this direction? Or is its number one priority the filling of certain individuals' pockets and bank accounts with proceeds from the toil and sweat of the poor, the oppressed and the socially excluded?

Six: Religion and common responsibility: future prospects

When we talk about the future of religion in our Islamic world, there is no need for us to prove that it is powerful and influential, even for those who are remiss in the observance of the *fara'idh* (religious obligations) and *arkan* ("pillars" of the Faith). Nor do we need to point out that after all the experiences it has undergone, the Islamic tide is rising, even if all Muslims still need to understand clearly that Islam is both a creed and a way of life, and to make an effort to master *fiqh al awlawiyyat* (an understanding of the priorities of decision-making).

However, what I really wish to focus on here is Christianity in Europe, the United States and the West in general, because the West is not only the heartland of secularism and its premier champion, but also the main driving force encouraging intellectuals and thinkers in the Islamic world to embrace and promote secularisation. Despite this, however, there are calls in Western societies (as their own people themselves testify) to recognize the importance of religion and religious values and their vital role in countering the perils of secularism.

Pope Benedict XVI warned Christians against the dire consequences for Western society if it abandoned its belief in God or its spiritual awareness and abolished religion at every level. In an interview with Peter Seewald he observed that without God man is not capable of truthfulness or able to create his own moral values, and that if he deserts his religion he

will lose his last place of refuge.”¹ Consequently his only option will be to arrange his affairs by himself in the most rational way possible, and in that case the majority view will be the only criterion he can adopt.

Let us now consider the position of Wang Gungwu – a proponent of secularisation – and his ideas on the future of secular values. In his view:

1) It is clear that there is no such thing as a set of pure secular values. The spiritual instinct needs to be satisfied and secularism is, at the very least, rooted in two faiths – Christianity and Buddhism. Even so, the point is that however superior secularism may be to the religions that underpin and nurture it, and whatever spiritual roots and moral principles it may share with them, it is not easy to reconcile it with them.

2) Today secular values are regarded as being universally applicable. However, they are applied selectively by the nation-state and –surprisingly – they are usually endorsed by religious tradition. Their selective nature has been a source of constant conflict, particularly between the great powers whose primary aim has been to extend their imperial hegemony, and it has led to two world wars. Because of this, the nationalistic form of secularism has begun to collapse because it has eradicated or undermined all the “universalist” elements of the value system.

3) Despite this, secularism has become so “pervasive” that it has encountered no hostility from the established religions for over two centuries, particularly during the five decades following the Second World War. However, the arrogance of the secularist theorists led to a “civil war” between the two major power blocs – the capitalist and Communist camps – who had divided the world between them. This had the effect of sapping many people’s energies and eroding their belief in secularism.

4) In today’s world the older religions and religious revivalist movements are beginning to raise their voices. Although resistance to all things secular has the potential to become a debilitating factor for countries in general, it has recently drawn strength from the anti-

¹ See Ray Azzopardi, *Op. Cit.* p 3.

secularisation movement which has arisen in reaction to some of the consequences of the “secularist civil war” referred to earlier. Today we see a growing and unprecedented gap between rich and poor and increasing rivalry between narrow, selfish national interests. The basis upon which secularism is founded is growing in strength and it is incumbent upon institutions and organisations to resist this religious revival so that the secular voice can again be heard loud and clear.

5) When secular values become globalised they find themselves up against global opposition, creating – in the eyes of many – a new “bipolarisation”. Therefore there is a need for a greater understanding of the spiritual vacuum which many people feel; this vacuum has helped reinforce values that are irreconcilable with secular values and add a “dramatic element” to the sense of despair which appears to be growing around the world.

6) The West and the Far East are two of the main strongholds of present-day secularism and the West seems to have a great deal of confidence in the secular values it has embraced. Japan and China have tried to develop their values from alternative interpretations of their own religious books and Western European and American ideas (including – most recently – the West’s rejection of Communism). Even so, both these two countries are trying to redefine the modern secular values they previously accepted in order to minimize the spiritual threat they pose to their peoples.

7) Finally, what are the future prospects for secular values as they are today? Quite simply, they are headed towards more of the same – i.e. further secularisation. When the prevailing values in the West and the Far East were rooted in Ancient Greece, Rome and Confucianism, they ultimately failed in both those regions. Later, however, it became possible to reinterpret Ancient Greek and Roman values through Islam and Christianity (despite the latter’s schisms), while Confucian values were reinterpreted through a unique blend of Buddhism and Taoism and regained their dominant position up till the 20th century.