

## Towards a post-secularist paradigm?

*Koos Vorster*

Department of Ethics, North-West University,  
Potchefstroom Campus, Potchefstroom, South Africa

### *Abstract*

This research article examines the validity of Berger's statement (Berger, 1999:2) that the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false (Berger is a sociologist of religion). Berger's statement was followed by the post-secularisation thesis, which was brought to the fore by the philosopher Habermas (2010:15). This article explores the notion of a possible emerging post-secularist paradigm. The central theoretical argument of the study is that the early twenty-first century indeed witnessed an upsurge of religion as a result of the development of postmodernism. The angle of approach in this article is that of the paradigm theory in the science of church history as developed by K ung (1995:62). I shall start by defining the main tenets of the concepts of paradigm and paradigm shift in church history. Secondly, I shall focus, in this article, on the modernist paradigm and explain secularisation as a result of this paradigm. Thirdly, my discussion will explore the emergence of the postmodernist paradigm and the possible revival of interest in religion and spirituality. In view of the description of the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism, the issue of the possibility of the emergence of a post-secularist culture is investigated. In conclusion, I shall indicate some of the possible implications of such a development for the church, namely, the pursuit of a plausible metatheory for theology, as well as the quest for a reformation of the church in order to address a post-secularist environment.

### **Introduction**

Since the 1960s, the phenomenon of secularisation has interested many scholars working in the field of philosophy and theology. This led to a huge corpus of literature and the debate continues today, especially after the publication of Taylor's in-depth research work (2007). According to Taylor (2007:20), the concept of secularisation is used to describe three predicaments. Firstly, it is used in a juridical and constitutional way and refers to the separation of Church and State in the development of modern democracies. Jurists speak of the secular state, and this means the independence of the state from religious bodies and the freedom of religion in the private domain. Secondly, the concept is used in a sociological sense and refers to the process of the decline of religious belief, and the fact that people are turning away from both God and the church (Taylor 2007:2). Secularisation as a sociological concept therefore describes the marginalisation of religion in society and the decrease of its sphere of competence (Laeyendecker 2005:903; Martin 2011:105). It is in this sense that Cliteur (2010:172) propagates secularisation in his recent study. This article will deal with secularisation as the sociological process of the decline of belief and practice that has influenced the Western world since the Enlightenment, and especially since the second half of the twentieth century. What is particularly noteworthy in this movement is its bearing on contemporary theological reflection. It is especially the theological reflection that has occurred in the face of secularisation that has grasped the attention of theologians and philosophers in the discourse about the extent and influence of secularisation in religious discourses.

Taylor (2007:20) argues that a third definition of secularisation can be identified, namely, a secularisation that "consists of new conditions of belief; it consists in a new shape to the experience which prompts to and is defined by belief; in a new contexts in which all search and questioning about the moral and the spiritual must proceed" (*see also* Taylor 2010:404). His distinction is indeed interesting and worth discussing. Taylor's analysis urges us to ask the following question: can we speak of faith in a time that has recently been characterised as post-Christian, a time in which the master-narrative of Christianity has faded away, as Lyotard (1991:XXIV) said in his epoch-making book of the late twentieth century? Taylor speaks of a third form of secularisation, but would it not be valid to speak instead of an emerging post-secularist paradigm? The concept of post-secularisation is well known in the debates of those who adhere to radical orthodoxy. An example here is the work of Milbank, Pickstock & Ward (1999:1). The sociologist of religion, Berger (1999:1), uses the concept "de-secularisation of the world" to describe the resurgence of religion today, and he even goes as far as to say that the secularisation theory is false. Furthermore, he asserts that those who neglect religion in their analyses of contemporary affairs do so at great peril (Berger 1999:18).

This article focuses on the possibility of the emergence of a post-secularisation paradigm and the implications of such a significant paradigm for the church and for the pursuance of Christian ethical answers to the macro-problems of the modern world. The central theoretical argument of the study is that the early twenty-

first century is witnessing an upsurge of religion as a result of the development of postmodernism. The angle of approach in this article is that of the paradigm theory in church history as developed by K ung (1995:62). To reiterate: I shall start by defining the main tenets of the concepts of paradigm and paradigm shift in church history. Secondly, the modernist paradigm will be addressed, followed by an explanation of secularisation as it results from the modernist paradigm. Thirdly, the focus will move to the emergence of a post-modernist paradigm and the possible revival of interest in religion and spirituality. In view of this description of the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism, the issue of the possibility of the emergence a post-secularisation culture will be investigated. In conclusion, I shall discuss some of the possible implications of such a development for the church.

### **Paradigms in church history**

Since Kuhn (1970:VIII) introduced the term “paradigm” to the world of science in the 1970s, the notion has since been applied with different nuances of significance in theology and the science of church history. Kuhn defined a paradigm as “universally recognised scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community or practitioners”. A paradigm is thus a view of reality which, in the first place, determines researchers’ starting points and approaches to the field under investigation. This view may be conscious or unconscious, and may pre-exist the rules and theory of scientific research (Kuhn 1970:44 & 46). As far as theology is concerned, Kuhn’s view had an impact on hermeneutics as a description of the starting points that precede the theory of how Scripture is understood (see Lategan, 1988:65). In this sense, for example, the historical-critical method of understanding Scripture is described as a paradigm (Vorster 1988:33). Sanks (1974:129) applies Kuhn’s theory to the Roman Catholic view of the authority of the church, while Bosch (1991:186) fruitfully applies Kuhn and K ung’s theories as a criterion for the distinction of historical-missiological models. In ecclesiology, Dulles (1974:29) has applied this theory as the key to the understanding of different, traditional church models. In his study of Christianity, K ung (1995:62) used the term to develop a new periodisation in church history. K ung maintains that the paradigm of a religion, “those macro-paradigms or epoch-making entire constellations”, is a possible way of selecting an overall view of the history of Christianity.

In spite of different definitions and applications of the notion of paradigm, Kuhn raises an important issue: scientific research is determined by a certain worldview that shapes presuppositions as principles driving the research process. The worldview, presuppositions and the principles influence the research process and can be characterised as a paradigm. All research is paradigm-driven. The researcher, and thus the theologian too, does not approach his or her field neutrally, unburdened or objectively, but functions within a specific paradigm. In setting forth this view, Kuhn decisively broke with the positivism of modernism. This topic will be addressed in more detail when the emergence of the postmodernist and post-secularist paradigm is discussed in section 4. What is important now is that we need to realise that such paradigms are also present in the history of the church, as K ung (1995:62) explains. In every period of church history, the ministry of churches is influenced by certain theological creeds, philosophical movements, political environments and even ideologies, and these “spirits of the times” form a paradigm for that particular age. These underlying but highly influential paradigms define the ecclesiastical points of departure and expectations that control the views of churches and the patterns of ministry of a particular historic era. (K ung 1995:61-788) detects several such paradigms in the history of the church, and these paradigms form the framework of his discussion of the history of Christianity.

Consecutive paradigm shifts are also possible. According to Kuhn (1970:11), a paradigm shift occurs when the old paradigm no longer provides answers to new realities. Researchers then start looking in new places and find new keys as instruments for exploring new realities. A revolution is thus triggered in researchers’ theories, research works and results. The same process consummates in the history of Christianity, although with one significant difference. When a paradigm shifts in the natural sciences, there is a total transition from old to new, while in history it manifests in such a way that the new does not replace the old immediately: the two can co-exist for a period of time (Bosch 1991:186). Several paradigms can co-exist for a period of time, but the one that provides the best answers to new realities will develop to become the dominant paradigm. The old paradigm will decline as the new paradigm is phased in.

In this article, paradigm theory is the angle of approach taken to discuss the problem at hand. The question is: do we see the emergence of a post-secularisation paradigm offering new challenges and opportunities to Christianity? To answer this question, the argument will now turn to an explanation of the main features of the paradigm of modernism and secularisation.

### **Modernism and secularisation**

The Enlightenment, with its enormous emphasis on rationalism and positivism, introduced a new paradigm or master narrative in Western thought (Walker, W. et al 1992:569). This paradigm became known as modernism, which delineates a period in the history of Christianity in the West (Weinzirl 2003:608; Viering 2003:611). The

dominance of reason (rationalism) over faith and science over religion is a major feature of this paradigm. Following the pre-modernist period of the dominance of religion and faith, rationalism became the guiding force in human thought. Reason became the ambit of the so-called neutral science and the development of new social theories. Moreover, society itself became the new object of scientific research (Milbank 2006:51). Sociology sidelined theology and social theory became the popular prominent topic in the human sciences. Taylor (2007:21) identifies this time as the time of “disenchantment” and refers to scholars who contend that modernity brought about secularisation and that modern society, because of the dominance of reason, cannot but bring about the “death of God”.

The new master narrative resulted in the growth of natural sciences, sociology and industrialisation – at the cost of theology and faith. Although Martin (2011:119) suggests that there is no constant relationship between the degree of scientific advance and a reduced profile of religious influence, belief and practice, the consequences of the development of science for religion cannot be overestimated. This trend resulted in a new appraisal of immanence at the cost of both metaphysics and interest in transcendence. Humans became inaccessible to religious experience and only accessible to that which could be proven rationally and that which was manageable (McGrath 1992:132). The emergence of the natural sciences, with their emphasis on the explainable and a reality that can be subject to scientific investigation, moved the interest away from spirituality, the after-life and Christian teachings (e.g. the bodily resurrection of Christ, his miracles, his ascension, and a new heaven and a new earth that will come into being at the second coming of Christ). Transcendence was moved out of the focus of scientific research into the domain of faith and religion.

Modernism also founded social planning and the necessity of management of structures at a macro level. In the centre of this adventure is the promotion, the advancement, of an industrialised mass market economy (Bruce 2010:205) with its extremely high regard for consumer culture. This consumer culture developed into a new ideology and way of life that can be defined as consumerism (see Vorster 2011:183). Consumerism is part and parcel of modern, neo-liberal economic philosophy and is a branch of the social and economic planning of modernism. The term “neo-liberalism” is used as an indication of the philosophy of economy as developed by Friedman (1971:61; 1973:27 & 1976:42). According to this philosophy, state initiatives in the economy should be limited as far as possible to enable markets to control the economy. This philosophy is based on three important presuppositions: the complete freedom of the individual; the freedom of the markets to control the economy unhindered; and the limitation of interference from the state in the economic sphere. All areas of life are managed according to business models. Even health care and education are shifting from being non-profit concerns, and are now the responsibility of profit-seeking providers. All areas of public space are invaded by advertising and marketing efforts. Public services have become privatised (Himes 2007:136), and advertising in emerging markets promote consumption as the way to a prosperous life. A significant result of this economic ideology is the growing gap between rich and poor in liberal democracies and between rich and poor countries. Modernist thought, with its powerful intellectual and rational impact, social planning and economic ideology, dominated the first half of the twentieth century. These lines of thought put pressure on belief and religion and everything that coheres with either. Theology was also approached rationally and the corollary of this was the so-called Theology of Secularisation (Cox 1967:20; Cairns 1982:444). Indeed, the negative influence of modernism on Christianity became evident in all the major ecclesiastical traditions in the Western world.

In the Lutheran tradition, the church had showed spectacular growth in influence and authority since the Reformation, and the success of Lutheranism had essentially influenced the history of a large part of Europe. In his classic historical survey, Vloemans (1954:168) points out that, after the Reformation of the sixteenth century, Lutheranism eliminated the phenomenon of widespread illiteracy and thus exercised a dynamic influence on European culture. The Lutheran church was dynamically involved in this process. Luther’s voice found a wide response in the whole of Christianity. However, during the course of the twentieth century, the dynamic strength of the Lutheran church in Europe weakened radically. In the 1960s, the German theologian Moltmann (1967:305) said that the church could no longer identify itself as society’s centre of gravity. The rise of the industrial world disturbed the relationship between “ecclesia” and “societas”. The church lost its role as the “inner principle of life of the society”. Adding to what Moltmann has to say, one must also keep in mind that World War II and the sympathy of some Lutherans with National Socialism plunged the Lutheran church into a crisis of credibility (Praamsma 1981:145). People came to question the need for a formal ecclesiastical institute of faith. Since then, the acceptance of the notion of “un-churchy” Christians has increased and has even been defended on theological grounds (Sölle 1967:117). Within Lutheranism the church that was once the powerful source of Christian culture has lost both influence and authority, and this tendency has compelled the Lutheran churches to try to counter the negative effects of all this through solid, global ecumenical collaboration (Nordstokke 1992:479).

The same trend became visible in the Roman Catholic tradition. Throughout the ages, the Roman Catholic Church has gone through phases of stagnation and dynamism, and had thus been an essential influence on Christianity in Europe. However, developments in the modern world after the Enlightenment put enormous pressure on the Roman Catholic Church. A church with old rituals and a long tradition has had to find ways to

maintain itself in a changing world, and this challenge has become a continuous theme in Roman Catholic ecclesiology. The first Vatican Council (1870) defied the revolutions of the Enlightenment, but Vatican II was more accommodating (Berger 1999:4). This fact is proven by the particular interest of the second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in the missionary vocation of the church. The document the "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church" focused on the unity of the church and laid particular emphasis on the missionary vocation of the church (Vatican Council II, 1964). Bosch (1979:184) shows that, by adopting this approach, the Roman Catholic Church moved away from the church as an institution and laid more emphasis on its missionary character. Interest thus deviated from the spiritual to the secular and especially to politics. Several Roman Catholic theologians have made significant contributions to the political theology of the last decades (see Fierro 1977:182). Conzales (1985:359) says that the Roman Catholic Church, after centuries of confrontation with the world, has now opened itself up to debate with the world. Within this tradition the debate with the world reflects a major ecclesiastical shift, and this shift is due to the challenges posed by modernism. However, this development did not curb the decline of the tradition, and Vatican II itself has even been blamed for this decline (Berger 1999:10).

In fact, a dynamic change had occurred. In the 1960s, the Roman Catholic sociologist of religion, Schreuder (1969:35), showed – with the help of the religio-sociological theories of Weber and Troeltsch – that the Roman Catholic Church, with its traditional manifestation as an international church with "ritual religiousness", had undergone a definite loss of function. Its political authority had languished and its pastoral and educational influence had to be replaced (owing to rivalry) with modern social institutions and social sciences. Roman Catholic Christians became more and more convinced that their faith and religion were no longer dependent on the institution of the church. Runia (1978:13) refers to research done on the changes within the Roman Catholic Church in Europe during the period 1963 to 1975. In 1963, 71% of Roman Catholics attended mass. By 1975, this percentage had decreased to 50%. In this second group the percentage of Christians who believed that Christ handed the leadership of the church to the Pope decreased from 70% (in 1963) to 42% (in 1975). The Roman Catholic Church as an institution increasingly lost its "grip" on the reasoning and lives of people it had once ruled with such confidence.

Similar trends could be discerned in the Protestant traditions in the United States and the United Kingdom, where the traditional role of the church has increasingly been questioned. In his illuminating analysis of the situation of the church in the United States twenty years ago, Farley (1990:171) says: "Mainline denominations, once used to vitality, growth and widespread influence, experience torpor and decline." The same trends are evident in the Protestant traditions in Britain. Brierley (1996) found that all the churches in this tradition since 1900, and especially since 1960, have suffered a tangible loss in sympathy. The process of secularisation fulfilled itself over more than three generations.

The shift that has been taking place at a wider level within the powerful Roman, Lutheran, American and British Protestant traditions has also manifested itself within other smaller traditions. As far as the Reformed tradition is concerned, the Dutch sociologist Dekker (1971:5) already found, in 1971, that participation in church activities had decreased and that there was in any case a "great change of character". He came to the conclusion that the church had come to have a limited meaning in society. The church is, sociologically, one of many institutions that exert an influence in life. For the modern person the activities of the church do not cover all the domains of his or her life and the church no longer has a dominant position in a modern person's life. More believers in this group find increasing difficulty with "timeless" realities that have the same meaning for everyone in every situation (Runia 1978:16). People would rather seek the truth in dialogue, and they therefore tend to reject monological preaching that claims to be based on "accepted truths". The Reformed articles of faith that for centuries were the marks of religious identity are increasingly being questioned. The church has also replaced functionality in this tradition. Just how far the church has changed its approach in Reformed circles in the Netherlands is evident in Kuitert's (1992:182 and 204) evaluation of the church. In a paper that strongly condemned the church, he called the church a disappointment, an entity that was self-sufficient, arrogant, enforcing, spiritually and materialistically enriched institution of power. The institution had, in the words of Nietzsche, become the "grave of God".

Developments that have occurred in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands are also systematically manifesting themselves within the Reformed tradition in South Africa. A comparative investigation into religious experience and church involvement of Christians in the Netherlands and South Africa revealed some differences, but also what can only be described as incredible similarities. These similarities are especially evident at the level of church concerns, where a trend of decreasing participation is visible in both (Pieterse, Scheepers & Van der Ven 1993:20). Declining involvement in church activities, a questioning of the confessions, loss of church function, peripheral involvement in the church and a frank dissociation from the church are increasingly evident in South Africa. How people have struggled with these shifts is evident in the works of Muller and Smit (1992:652), Hendriks (1992:7; 1996:70) and the information the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) published in its project entitled "Kerkspieël" (Mirror of the Church). Hendriks

(1996:141) shows convincingly, by means of statistically processed information, that the Reformed churches in South Africa have all experienced a decline in membership numbers.

The above review shows that, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the mainline churches lost both meaning and influence. This same trend can be discerned in virtually all the South African ecclesiastical traditions, with the exception of the African Initiated Churches and certain Pentecostal churches. What has contributed to this process? Why do people appear to be seceding from the church and seeking a reason for life and spirituality outside the church and without the ministry of the church? The general trend in ecclesiology was to look for the causes of this process in secularisation. Secularisation describes the process “by which religious thinking, practices and institutions lose social significance” (Smith 1985:36). In this sense, secularisation was latently present throughout the history of the church, but in the recent past the process has strongly influenced views of the church and fundamental Christian dogmas (Edwards 1987:285). Christian belief has been questioned so vigorously that the end of the twentieth century has been described as a time of “the Eclipse of God” (Verboom 1991:115 and Dekker 1991:135). According to this view, humanity must be freed from the religious and the metaphysical.

The process of secularisation has even led to a Theology of Secularisation. Smith (1992:169) indicates how the “God-is-dead” movement of the 1970s attempted to establish an immanence theology that radically broke with traditional Christianity. The main representatives of this movement were Altizer (1966:95), Hamilton (1966:49), Vahanian (1961:230) and Cox (1967:27). In this theological paradigm, the focus was on the example of the historical Jesus as a man; as a result, people looked for a Christianity where humanity played the central role. The church as an institution for religious growth was removed from view. In the course of the subsequent decade, a political theology in which the church is only regarded as another political instrument in society's transformation succeeded this view. The influence of secularisation on the present-day worldview is undoubtedly enormous and, as far as the church's loss of function is concerned, must be taken seriously.

An important negative corollary of the secularisation process is the development of a negative attitude among Christians regarding the church and Christianity. Believers have grown up in a declining church and, as a result, have developed a weak “church self-image”. This negativity led to a lack of diligence in terms of fulfilment of vocation and spiritual renewal which, in turn, gave further impetus to a snowball effect in the ongoing deterioration of the church. The decreasing sympathy created a spirit of negativity and hopelessness, and the spirit of negativity, in turn, led to decreasing sympathy. Indeed, this negative inclination, which is the result of modernist secularisation, must be regarded as one of the greatest obstacles in the way of ecclesiastical involvement today.

Modernism thus brought about a huge wave of secularisation that questioned the very essence of Christianity and the worthiness of the Christian church. Post-war Western thought was characterised by this wave, and secularisation as a description of the demise of religion was a popular topic in philosophy and theology. However, it seems that a revival of religion is at hand. Cliteur (2010:1) refers to contemporary scholars such as Stark and Finke, who argue that the secularisation thesis has failed, and that it is time to bury this thesis. Habermas (2010:15) describes the changing paradigm as post-secularist and Martin (2011:55) asks the question whether secularisation has gone into reverse. The focus now turns to this emerging paradigm.

### **Postmodernism and post-secularisation**

Postmodernism describes a new condition in Western thought and culture. According to Bauman (2004:238), the term “postmodernism” accurately renders the defining traits of the social condition that emerged throughout the affluent countries of Europe and European descent during the course of the twentieth century, and that took its present shape in the second half of the twentieth century. While this condition entered Western culture in the latter part of the twentieth century, Küng (1991:2) dates it back as far as 1918 (i.e. at the end of World War I). In Küng's view, 1918 was a turning point in Western history because it brought the collapse of bourgeois society and the Eurocentric world as it existed at the outbreak of World War I. It is true that the early part of the twentieth century witnessed radical changes in Western culture. However, most scholars date the emergence of postmodernism back to the 1970s and 1980s. The latter part of the twentieth century thus became known as the time of a paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism (see Gill 1997:15).

The concept “postmodernism” became popular after the publication of the French philosopher Lyotard's book *La Condition post-moderne: Rapport sur le savoir* in 1979. Since then, virtually all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences accepted the reality of a new emerging postmodernist paradigm, which implied a new direction in Western thought and culture. According to Lyotard (1991:XXIII), the time of the meta-narrative, which was the strength of modernism, has elapsed. He defined the emerging postmodernism of the time as incredulity towards metanarratives (the Enlightenment, Christianity and the great Western institutions). Postmodernism is thus a new condition that questions the suitability of the metanarratives of the past. It questions both Christianity and the Enlightenment, both the Western ethos and its great institutions, and the

premise of rationalism and its scientific methods. In short, postmodernism became the new paradigm, a paradigm that had very new features.

Two features of postmodernism are worth discussing, albeit briefly, in the debate about the resurgence of religion. Firstly, postmodernism posits that truth is relative and that moral codes can never be seen as fixed codes (see Gill 1997:153). In his incisive explanation of this new condition, Gill (1997:17) says that the notion of secular, rational progress implicit in much of the Enlightenment tradition has become increasingly implausible. In addition, more ancient assumptions that the European countries are fundamentally Christian in ethos have also become implausible. According to Gill, postmodernism claims that no single metanarrative can hope to secure consensus in a postmodern culture. Both secular rationalism and Christian belief are now seen as faith positions held variously by individuals who lack any common meta-position. Ethics and rationality have therefore become privatised. Instead of relying on and promoting the great metanarratives of the past, postmodernism presents the credibility of pluralism.

This fundamental argument of postmodernism is the result of an anti-modernist view of the condition of knowledge (Lyotard 2004:123). The best way to explain this condition is to refer again to the postmodernist view of doing science. According to the postmodernist view of scientific methodology, the focus of scientific research should no longer be on the premise of objectivity in doing science, but on the subject, the scientist. Postmodernism is interested not only in the object of research (which, according to modernism, could be approached with an objective mind), but also in the scientists themselves, with all their presuppositions. The reason for this interest lies in the fact that all knowledge is gained through the filters of our presuppositions. Presuppositions play a determining role in science. Metanarratives have ceased to exist, and scientists approach their field of study from certain angles or presuppositions that, in the end, determine their results. Owing to the interaction between the presuppositions and the results, the matter of truth becomes relative. No concept can escape this structure (Derrida 2004:148). How can one result be elevated to the true fixed result when it is inherently determined by a presupposition? What gives it more credibility than any other result reached through another presupposition? In the area of culture it leads to the question: if there are no metanarratives, there is unlikely to be a common understanding of metaethics (Gill 1997:18). In the end, everyone will determine their own truths that suit them in their own situation and their own environment. There can be no fixed truths or ethical norms. What is perceived as morally sound in one community may be regarded as immoral in another.

Moreover, reason cannot claim the truth over and above religion. Just as modernism questioned religion, postmodernism questions reason and the "reasonable claim to truth". Truth is relative. More than one truth can be plausible at the same time. More than one moral norm can be acceptable in the same situation. Postmodernism therefore rejects the idea of absolute truths, principles and norms. It professes the validity of diversity and relativity in the definition of truth and moral virtues. The strict distinction between virtue and vice and the grand narratives of modernism are replaced by a nuanced view of the "virtues of some" and the "virtues of others". Relativism replaces the absolutism of certain invariable truths and norms. Humankind has to accept that diversity and pluralism are facts of life. K ung (1991:20) asserts that humankind moves in the direction of a post-ideological culture that, in future, will be a culture more orientated towards an overall plurality. "Everything goes" and "nothing is sacred". Post-modernism entails a re-enchantment of the human experience (Ward 2003:130), a re-enchantment that manifests itself in the quest for spirituality and religion. As a result of this pluralism the Christian faith, among others, has again become a valid narrative.

The second feature of postmodernism that can be regarded as relevant in the debate about the upsurge of religions is its notion of the equivalence of all religions. Postmodernism introduced a theology of religions that claims that all religions are of equal value and that the various religious traditions are mere branches of the tree of human religiosity. In fact, and unlike modernism, postmodernism is sympathetic to the idea that religion is relevant in modern society and should have a place in modern life. Just as postmodernism is concerned with the subjects and the validity of their presuppositions in doing science, it is concerned with people and their feelings, emotions and spirituality. According to K ung (1991:20), the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism entails a development from a technocracy that dominates people to a technology that serves the humanity of men and women and from an industry that destroys the environment to an industry that furthers the true interests and needs of men and women in accordance with nature. Postmodernism is concerned about the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of human beings in the legalistic, agnostic and technocratic society which it regards as the heritage of the modernist paradigm. Postmodernism, in spite of its acceptance of pluralism and the relativity of "truths", is more "religion-friendly" owing to its new appreciation of spirituality, metaphysics, re-enchantment and openness to religions as valid worldviews among other worldviews. It is this feature of postmodernism that can be regarded as one of the main reasons for the new interest in spirituality and religiosity.

Given the characteristics of postmodernism, a new post-secularist paradigm has emerged. Habermas (2010:18) identifies a new awareness in Western thought: the awareness that religious traditions are unexhausted forces that have not been driven into isolation by secularisation, but have merely been redirected. This tendency developed as modernism started to decline. By the end of the twentieth century, Farley (1990:171) already identified a shift in the United States from the Episcopalian, Congregationalist and

Presbyterian churches to the Roman Catholic Church and even to the spirituality of other religions such as Islam and Hinduism. Furthermore, since then, the United States has experienced the rise of fundamentalist churches and the so-called TV evangelists. Fenn (1990:171) reaches the same conclusion and especially refers to the emerging trend of informal religious practice in contrast with the traditional religious organisation of the church as an institution. This trend explains the surge in pietism, emotionalism and enthusiasm in Christian religious circles, such as the global phenomenon of the Charismatic movement. Growth was only evident in the so-called home congregations or, as they call themselves at present, the "new churches" (Brierley, 1996). Taylor (2007:727) comments that our age is far from settling down into a state of comfortable unbelief. Berger (1999:7) typifies Islamic and evangelical religions as the two most dynamic religious upsurges in the world today. He even identifies strong surviving trends of religion among those churches of Europe that have faced the current influence of secularisation, notwithstanding the fact that many people are alienated from organised churches.

In his research about the future of Christianity, Martin (2011:105) reports interesting findings. He finds that, with the exception of Western Europe, Christianity, especially in the form of Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism, has made huge inroads in the global community. Of particular interest is the development of Christianity in Latin America, Africa, Russia, China and the rest of the Orient. However, according to his research, religion in the rest of Western and Central Europe offers little evidence that "God is back" or of post-secularisation (Martin, 2011:93). Zieberts and Riegel (2009:293) differ from Martin in their conclusions. Based on international empirical data they observe a revival of religion in Europe as well, and see several indicators that religions are increasing in public relevance. Though it does not translate in an increase in church attendance, post-secularisation is giving rise to a new, relevant kind of religion where religion is seen as a source of socio-moral commitment because it proposes an ethical orientation (Zieberts & Riegel 2009:300).

Commenting on this phenomenon, Smith (2008:3) contends that Christianity is no longer a "Western religion" and that the centre of gravity of global Christianity has shifted to the southern hemisphere. The resurgence of Christianity in two-thirds of the world is indeed remarkable. Taking into account the various trends in Christianity today, it is fair to conclude that the contemporary world is witnessing a revival of Christianity. The same is true of Islam in certain parts of the world. Modern social movements are thus inextricably linked to the phenomenon of religion (Smith, 2008:3). In an evaluation of this trend, Sigurdson (2010:177) concludes that sociologists of religion now generally speak of the "de-secularisation" or the "re-enchantment" of the world, and that the outcome of secularisation has not resulted, as was generally expected some decades ago, in the disappearance of religion.

## Conclusion

Can we speak of the emergence of a post-secularisation paradigm, as Habermas (2010:15) did? It seems that such a notion is not far-fetched. Post-secularisation (or re-enchantment) is indeed a significant trend in contemporary societies. This trend poses new challenges to Christian theology and the church. Theology has new space to explain its metaphysical roots and destination. In a new “religion-friendly” environment, theology can engage itself in the development of a plausible metatheory for today. The same is true of the church.

In the light of what has been discussed above it is more nuanced to maintain that, in the final analysis, human beings have not turned their back on the church because of secularisation, but that they have new and different expectations of the church. Stated differently, the church is now confronted with a new postmodernist reality in which the old answers, patterns of worship, institutionalisms, formalism and traditional boundaries no longer address the demands of the day. The church has therefore not reached the end of the road (as alleged by the Theology of Secularisation), but has entered a new context strongly influenced by the spirit of postmodernism and post-secularisation.

Although the ecclesiastical structures of the past have lost their credibility, the church can still find ways to feed people’s need for re-enchantment and spirituality, and to help humankind on its quest for meaning and morality. Furthermore, the church can become a meaningful and potent moral agent in the structuring of morally sound societies and in the promotion of reconciliation and peace. It is to these ends that Christian theology should focus its mind in the post-secularisation society of our time.

## Works consulted

- Altizer, T.J.J. 1966. Theology and the death of God, in Altizer, T.J.J & Hamilton, W. (eds.), *Radical theology and the death of God*. New York/Kansas City : The Bobbs Merrill Col.
- Bauman, Z. 2004. A sociological theory of post-modernity, in Drolet, R. (ed.), *The postmodernism reader*. London: Routledge, 238-249.
- Berger, P. 1999. The desecularization of the world: A global overview, in Berger, P. et al, *The desecularisation of the World. Resurgent religion and world politics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1-18.
- Bosch, D.J. 1979. *Heil vir die wêreld. Die Christelike sending in teologiese perspektief*. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel.
- Bosch, D.J. 1991. *Transforming mission. Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. New York: Mary-Knoll.
- Brierley, P. 1996. In a personal interview concerning the tendencies in the churches in Great Britain. 13 September 1996. England: Eltham.
- Bruce, S. 2010. Secularization in the UK and the USA, in Brown, C.G. & Snape, M. (eds.), *Secularization in the Christian world*. Surry: Ashgate, 205-2218.
- Cairns, E.E. 1982. *Christianity through the centuries*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Cliteur, P. 2010. *The secular outlook. In defence of moral and political secularization*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwill.
- Conzales, J.L. 1985. *The story of Christianity*. San-Francisco: Harper. 2 Volumes.
- Cox, H. 1967. *De stad van de mens, het levenspatroon van de moderne wereld in theologisch perspektief*. Utrecht: Ambo Boeken.
- Dekker, G. 1971. *Wat is er met de kerk aan de hand? Over de positie en funksie van de kerk in de huidige sameleving*. Kampen: J.H. Kok.
- Dekker, W. 1991. Prediking in een tijd van godsverduistering. *Theologia Reformata*, 34(2):135-150, June.
- Derrida, J. 2004. From outwork, prefacing in dissemination, in Drolet, R. (ed.), *The postmodernism reader*. London: Routledge, 147-153).
- Dulles, A. 1974. *Models of the church*. London: Doubleday.
- Edwards, D.L. 1987. *The futures of Christianity*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Farley, E. 1990. The modernist element in Protestantism. *Theology Today*, 57(2), 131-148.
- Fenn, R.K. 1990. The church in the world. The Church with the soul of a nation. *Theology Today*, 57(2), 171-170.
- Fierro, A. 1977. *The militant Gospel. An analysis of contemporary political theologies*. London: SCM Press.
- Friedman, M. 1971. *A theoretical framework for monetary analysis*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Friedman, M. 1973. *Money and economic development. The Horowitz Lectures of 1972*. New York: Praeger.
- Friedman, M. 1976. *Milton Friedman in South Africa. His visit to the Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town. March – April 1976*. Cape Town: UCT.
- Gill, R. 1997. *Moral leadership in a post-modern Age*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.



- Habermas, J. 2010. An awareness of what is missing, in Habermas, J. et al., *An awareness of what is missing. Faith and reason in a post-secularist age*. Cambridge: Polity, 15–23.
- Hamilton, W. 1966. The death of God: Theologies today, in Alitzer, T.J.J. & Hamilton, W. (eds.), *Radical theology and the death of God*. New York/Kansas City: The Bobbs Merrill Company.
- Hendriks, J. 1992. *Gemeentes vertel. Verandering in 'n Christelike geloofsgemeenskap*. Kaapstad: Lux Verbi.
- Hendriks, J. 1996. Vernuwning in bedieningstruktuur. *Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif*, XXVII(1), 72-85, January.
- Kuhn, T.S. 1970. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kuitert, H.M. 1992. *Het algemeen betwijfeld christelijke geloof*. Baarn: Ten Have.
- Küng, H. 1991. *Global responsibility. In search of a new world ethic*. London: SCM Press.
- Küng, H. 1995. *Christianity. The religious situation of our time*. London: SCM Press.
- Laeyendecker, L. 2005. Secularization – sociological aspects, in Fahlbusch, E. et al, *The Encyclopaedia of Christianity*, Vol 4. Leiden: Brill, 901-904.
- Lategan, B.C. 1988. Why so few converts to new paradigms in Theology? in Mouton, J., Van Aarde, A.G. & Vorster, W.S. (eds.), *Paradigms and progress in theology*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Lyotard, J.F. 1991. *The post-modern condition: A report on knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Lyotard, J.F. 2004. The post-modern condition: A report on knowledge, in Drolet, R. (ed.), *The postmodernism reader*. London: Routledge, 123-146.
- Martin, D. 2011. *The future of Christianity. Reflections on violence and democracy, religion and secularization*. Surrey: Ashgate.
- McGrath, A.E. 1992. *Bridge-building: effective Christian apologetics*. Leicester: Intervarsity Press.
- Milbank, J., Pickstock, C. & Ward, G. 1999. Introduction. Suspending the material: the turn of radical orthodoxy, in Milbank, J; Pickstock, C & Ward, G. et al, *Radical orthodoxy*. London: Routledge, 1-20.
- Milbank, J. 2006. *Theology and social theory. Beyond secular reason*. 2nd edition. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Moltmann, J. 1967. *Theology of hope*. London: SCM Press.
- Muller, B.A. & Smit, D.J. 1991. Godsdien in die openbaar. Tendense in die Afrikaanse Godsdienprogramme van die SAUK. *Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif*, XXXII(4), 652-666, December.
- Nordstokke, K. 1992. The ecclesiastical self-understanding of the Lutheran World Federation: From “Free Association” to “Communion of Churches”. *The Ecumenical Review*, 44(4), 479-490.
- Pieterse, H.J.C., Scheepers, P.L.H. & Van der Veen, J.A. 1993. Plural religious beliefs: a comparison between Dutch and White South Africans. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 49(1 & 2), 189-207.
- Praamsma, L. 1981. *The Church in the twentieth century*. Volume VII. Ontario: Paideia Press.
- Runia, K. 1978. *Eigentijdse vragen*. Kampen: J.H. Kok.
- Sanks, T.H. 1974. *Authority in the Church. A study in changing paradigms*. Montana: Scholars Press.
- Schreuder, O. 1969. *Gedaanteverandering van de Kerk. Aanbevelingen voor vernieuwing*. Nijmegen/Utrecht: Dekker en van de Vegt NV.
- Sigurdson, O. 2010. Beyond secularism? Towards a post-secularist political theology. *Modern Theology*. 26(2), 177-196
- Smith, D.L. 1992. *A handbook of contemporary theology. Tracing trends and discerning directions in today's theological landscape*. Wheaton: Bride Point.
- Smith, G.C. 1985. *The Seeds of secularization, Calvinism, culture and pluralism in America, 1870-1915*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.
- Smith, J.K.A. 2008. Secularity, globalisation, and the re-enchantment of the World, in Smith, J.K.A. (ed.), *After modernity? Secularity, globalisation, and the re-enchantment of the world*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 3-16.
- Sölle, D. 1967. *De waarheid is concreet*. Amsterdam: Ten Have.
- Taylor, C. 2007. *A secular age*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. 2010. Challenging issues about the secular age. *Modern Theology* 26(3), 404-416.
- Vahanian, G. 1961. *The death of God, the culture of our post-Christian era*. New York : George Braziller.
- Vatican Council II. 1964. Dogmatic constitution on the Church, in Leith, J.H. (ed.), *Creeds of the churches. A Reader in Christian doctrine from the bible to the present*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 459–484).
- Verboom, W. 1991. Prediking in een tijd van godsverduistering. *Theologia Reformata*, 34(2):115-134, June.
- Viering, J. 2003. Modernity, in Fahlbusch, E. et al, *The encyclopaedia of Christianity*. Volume 3. Brill: Eerdmans, 611–616.
- Vloemans, A. 1954. *Cultuurgeschiedenis van Europa*. Den Haag: H.P. Leopold's.
- Vorster, J.M. 2011. “Go out and gather each day ...” Implications of the ethics of Exodus 16 for modern consumerism. *Koers* 76(1), 171-192.
- Vorster, W.S. 1988. Towards a post-critical paradigm. Progress in New Testament scholarship, in Mouton, J. (ed.), *Paradigm and progress in theology*. Pretoria: HSRC.

- Walker, W. et al 1992. *A history of the Christian Church*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Ward, G. 2003. *True religion*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Weinzirl, E. 2003. Modernism, in Fahlbusch, E. et al, *The encyclopaedia of Christianity*. Volume 3. Brill: Eerdmans, 607–611.
- Ziebertz, H. & Riegel, U. 2009. Europe: A post-secularist society? *The International Journal of Practical Theology*. 13(1), 293-308.