RELIGIOSITY AND RADICAL SECULARISM: FAITH, NON-BELIEF, AND THE DYNAMICS OF HATRED IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL EXTREMISM

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Abstract

This article examines how religiosity and radical secularism shape the identities and practices of contemporary political extremism, and how the sacred–profane dichotomy fuels mutual hatred between the far right and the far left. Drawing on a critical synthesis of institutional reports (Europol, ISD), comparative academic analyses (Haynes; Jasko et al.; START), and research documents on major attacks (Program on Extremism), the text offers an interdisciplinary approach, sociological, political, and security-oriented, to explain why and how faith (or its repudiation) becomes a driver of violent or symbolic mobilization. We identify key mechanisms: the instrumentalization of religion as a moral and identity-based foundation by the radical right; the transformation of ideology into a "secular religion" on the radical left; the amplification of antagonism through digital ecosystems; and the spiral effect of reciprocal legitimization of violence.

Based on these findings, the introduction identifies early warning signs of risk, such as the normalization of "replacement" narratives, the migration of extremist discourse to alt-tech platforms, and the territorialization of protests, and outlines directions for further analysis (scenarios for 2025-2030, preventive measures). The study provides researchers and policymakers with a framework for understanding how differing relationships to the sacred and the profane contribute to vulnerabilities in security and democratic cohesion, emphasizing the need for integrated strategies, political, educational, and digital, that address both ideological components and the media through which they are transmitted.

Keywords: religiosity; secularism; extremism; political, ideology; hatred

Introduction

Contemporary political polarization has acquired a dimension that goes beyond economic or institutional disputes: the confrontation between the far right and the far left has gradually transformed into a conflict of an axiological and even ontological nature, in which the relationship to the sacred (religion, tradition) and the profane (militant secularism, critique of religion) becomes a central component of political identity. This religiosity, no religiosity dimension is not a rhetorical accessory; it structures the frameworks through which collective action is justified, motivates mobilization, and, under certain conditions, legitimizes violence. The present approach starts from the premise that differentiation in relation to the sacred, whether through an appeal to faith or through its rejection, is a key driver of mutual hatred between the extremes and, as such, a critical variable for understanding short- and medium-term security risks. The central argument we advance is threefold: (1) The contemporary far right often exploits religious resources (symbols, narratives of civilizational roots, appeals to "Christian values") to construct a moral

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foundation that justifies exclusion; (2) The radical far left, typically secularist, transforms ideology into a sacral substitute, with dogmas, collective rituals, and emblematic figures, such that the rejection of religion becomes a sacred principle in itself; (3) This symmetry (sacred for some vs. sacred for others) fuels mutual hatred, turning political events into flashpoints for symbolic confrontation and, in extreme cases, physical violence. These claims are supported through a synthesis of existing literature and reference to recent empirical data from security reports and case studies.

Recent data and evidence confirm both the complexity and relevance of this thesis. The ISD report on the "Great Replacement" documents how the conspiracy theory has been normalized in public discourse and used as a declared motivation in lethal attacks (for example, Christchurch, 2019), a striking example of how identity narratives and the "defense of values" become justifications for extreme violence.[1] Europol, in its TE-SAT 2021 report, shows that violent threats within the EU are becoming increasingly diverse: alongside jihadist attacks, forms of political violence attributed to both the far right and the far left/anarchist movements persist, while attacks on symbols, including places of worship, remain a form of protest with a high potential for escalation[2]. Comparative research (for example, the START/UMD analysis and PNAS studies) provides quantitative context regarding the frequency and nature of violence committed by actors with different ideological orientations, showing that while the types of violence and targeted objectives tend to differ, no ideological camp is inherently protected from escalation[3].

In theoretical terms, the interpretation of the data can be situated within a Durkheimian framework and contemporary studies of public religion: Durkheim demonstrated that the sacralization of symbols creates social bonds and legitimizes cohesion[4]. Applied to the political context, this theory explains how religion, or, in its absence, ideology (with sacred functions), becomes an instrument for building the cohesion of the extremist group. Casanova and others have insightfully discussed the ways in which religion re-enters public life as a political resource, a phenomenon exploited by populist and radical actors[5]. Complementarily, Hervieu-Léger and Durkheim suggest that in the absence of a traditional religion, "chains of memory", ideological and ritual in nature, can emerge, taking over religious functions in secular forms[6]. The mechanisms through which religiosity and radical secularism generate and amplify mutual hatred are manifold. First and foremost, there is the instrumentalization of narratives: right-wing rhetoric often evokes apocalyptic imagery of

[1] Jacob Davey, Julia Ebner, *The 'Great Replacement': The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 2019, PDF, (see pp. 6–8 for the discussion concerning Christchurch and the normalization of narratives), https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf (07.10.2025)

[2] Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2021*, European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, PDF, 2021, pp. 34–41, https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/tesat_2021_0.pdf (07.10.2025)

[3] Katarzyna Jasko, Gary LaFree, James Piazza, Michael H. Becker, *A comparison of political violence by left-wing, right-wing and Islamist extremists in the United States and the world*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), (comparative analysis), "Psychological and Cognitive Sciences", Vol. 119, No. 30, July 18, 2022, https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2122593119 (07.10.2025)

START (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism)/University of Maryland, *Political Violence Across Ideological Categories*, 2022, https://www.start.umd.edu/events/political-violence-across-ideological-categories (07.10.2025)

[4] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Free Press, New York, 1995 (1912), pp. 221-222

[5] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, pp. 3-5

[6] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 2000, pp. 3-5; Émile Durkheim, *Op. cit.*, pp. 77, 205

decline (such as the "replacement" of native populations or the loss of "Christian values"), while the radical left employs discourses of liberation, anti-patriarchy, and the "illegitimate" dismantling of religious institutions[1]. These narratives do not coexist passively; they are mediated and amplified by informational ecosystems, mainstream platforms, alt-tech networks, and the "dark social" sphere, where content becomes trapped within echo chambers.[2] Secondly, there is the sacralization of political practices: demonstrations, marches, and counter-protests acquire ritualistic features. For left-wing groups, marches and urban occupations can function as rituals of iconic communion;[3] for right-wing groups, "tradition-preserving" gatherings and religious invocations acquire a sacramental significance, transforming political protest into a "mission"[4]. These dynamic narrows the space for negotiation: what is deemed "sacred" cannot be negotiated, compromise becomes betrayal, and rational dialogue is replaced by emotional mobilization. Thirdly, there is the "beauty-and-beast" feedback loop: the symbolic or violent actions of one side are used by the other to justify retaliatory measures, for instance, attacks on religious sites may fuel persecution narratives, which in turn provoke violent responses from the self-proclaimed "defenders of values"[5]. The result is an escalatory spiral that transforms local conflicts into incidents with national or transnational implications. Another critical vector concerns institutional infiltration and state legitimacy. Studies on Christian nationalism in the U.S. show how identity-based religious rhetoric can generate support for policies that erode trust in institutions[6], in other political contexts (the U.S., Sweden, Norway, Finland, Poland, Germany, Russia), the ideological alignment between power and religion diminishes the space for democratic opposition.[7] On the left, radical movements may perceive the state as an

[1] Jacob Davey, Julia Ebner, *Op. cit.*, pp. 4–8; Jeffrey Haynes, *Right-Wing Populism and Religion in Europe and the USA*, "Religions", 2020, Vol. 11, No. 10, Art. 490, 2020, pp. 4-7, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11100490

[2] Jacob Davey, Julia Ebner, *Op. cit.*, pp. 24-28; Samantha Walther, Andrew McCoy, *US Extremism on Telegram: Fueling Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Accelerationism*, in Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 15, No. 2, April 2021, ICCT research (research on the migration of extremist content toward alt-tech platforms), pp. 100-101

[3] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Op. cit.*, pp. 85-91

[4] Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, Polity Press, Malden, MA, Cambridge, UK, 2008, p. 66; pp. 96-98

[5] Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2021*, pp. 41-46; Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Moustafa Ayad, *The Age of Incoherence? Understanding Mixed and Unclear Ideology Extremism*, Program on Extremism/National Counterterrorism, Innovation, Technology, and Education Center – US Department of Homeland Security-Centre of Excellence, June 2023, p. 8; p. 11, p. 29, https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-06/the-age-of-incoherence-final.pdf (21.02.2026)

[6] Andrew L. Whitehead, Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, pp. 18-19; Iulian Dinulescu, *Motivation of Qanon Conspiracy Theories Appropriation by Christians and the Expansion of the Phenomenon in 2022*, "Strategic Impact", No. 2/2022, "Carol I" National Defence University Publishing House Bucharest, Romania, pp. 72-84; Iulian Dinulescu, *Religion and Politics in the Context of the 6 January 2021 Assault on the US Congress*, "Strategic Impact", No. 2/79, 2021, "Carol I" National Defence University Publishing House Bucharest, Romania, pp. 78-92; Iulian Dinulescu, *The Interference of the Far-Right Ideology Qanon with Christianity*, "Strategic Impact", No. 1/78, 2021, "Carol I" National Defence University Publishing House Bucharest, Romania, pp. 118-134

[7] Anna Maria Grzymała-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015, pp. 3-25; Zoe Knox, *Russian Orthodoxy, Russian Nationalism, and Patriarch Aleksei II*, "Nationalities Papers", Vol. 33, No. 4, 2005, pp. 533-545, https://figshare.le.ac.uk/articles/journal_contribution/Russian_Orthodoxy_Russian_Nationalism_and_Patriarch_Aleksii_II/10078862 (24.04.2026); Iulian Dinulescu, *The Risks to Germany's Peace and Security Generated by The Reichsbürger Movement or "Citizens Of The Reich" Based on Political and Religious Convictions*, "Romanian Military Thinking", No. 4, 2023, pp. 138-149; Iulian Dinulescu, *The Risks to Society Generated by "Sovereign Citizens" Based on the Attitude Influenced by Religious Beliefs*, "Studia Securitatis", No. 2, 2023, pp. 62-72; Iulian Dinulescu, *Between the Sacred and the Violent: The Russian Imperial Movement and the New*

instrument of oppression and employ direct action as a means of subversion a strategy that, when combined with economic or social crises, creates a context conducive to escalation[1]. In short, the factors that make this dynamic particularly dangerous over the next five years are: (a) the normalization of transnational conspiratorial narratives (e.g., the "Great Replacement"); (b) the migration of extremist content to less-moderated platforms (alt-tech, Telegram, dark social), where it is difficult to detect and counter; (c) the intersection of crises (economic, climate, migration) that amplify grievances; and (d) the erosion of institutional trust, which undermines the effectiveness of legal and social responses[2].

This introduction provides the conceptual framework and basic empirical evidence necessary for the subsequent chapters: (I) Religion as a resource for right-wing mobilization; (II) Radical secularism as the "political religion" of the left; (III) The dynamics of mutual hatred (sacred–profane); and (IV) Implications for internal security, including scenarios and practical recommendations for 2025-2030. In what follows, each component will be examined in detail, with references to case studies, statistical data, and proposals for public policy, community-based prevention, and the regulation of digital ecosystems.

Religion and the Far Right: Moral Foundation and Exclusion

Religion, particularly in its institutional or civilizational forms, has consistently been used by far-right movements to construct a moral framework justifying exclusion. Within the logic of these movements, nation, faith, and social order are perceived as inseparable, and the defence of religious identity becomes a sacred mission. Haynes notes that the rise of right-wing populism in Europe and the U.S. is inseparable from the revalorization of religion as a tool of collective identity, a form of "religious nationalism" in which Christianity functions more as a "cultural symbol" than as a doctrinal system[3]. This type of sacralization of national identity produces an effect of moral exclusion. Minority groups, migrants, or secular individuals are portrayed as threats to an order considered divine or natural. As Bruce notes, "religion provides a transcendent justification for hierarchy and difference"[4]. Within this framework, symbolic violence (discourses, exclusionary policies) becomes a form of social purification.

The phenomenon known as "Christian Nationalism" has become a cornerstone of the American radical right discourse, but it has clear analogues in Central and Eastern Europe. Whitehead and Perry argue that Christian nationalism does not represent merely "a set of religious beliefs" but "an ideology" that fuses "Christianity" with "national identity" and with a sense of "legitimate possession" over "public space"[5]. Robert P. Jones's analysis of the events on January 6, 2021, the attack on the U.S. Capitol, highlights the role that religious symbols and rhetoric played in legitimizing extremist actions. Protesters employed crosses, Bibles, banners with Christian messages, and Bible-inspired rituals (such as the "Jericho" marches) to impart spiritual meaning to their political endeavour. Jones emphasizes that these

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Paradigm of Terrorism, "Studia Securitatis", No. 2, 2024, pp. 68-77; Iulian Dinulescu, *The Nordic Resistance Movement as a Threat to European and International Security,* "Romanian Military Thinking", No. 4, 2024, pp. 380-397

[1] Katarzyna Jasko, Gary LaFree, James Piazza, Michael H. Becker, *Op. cit.*, p. 2

[2] Jacob Davey, Julia Ebner, *Op. cit*, pp. 6-7; Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2021*, pp. 7-12; Samantha Walther, Andrew McCoy, *Op. cit.*, pp. 100-124

[3] Jeffrey Haynes, *Op. cit.*, p. 3

[4] Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In defence of an unfashionable theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, 2011, p. 103

[5] Andrew L. Whitehead, Samuel L. Perry, *Op. cit.*, p. 17

symbols were not mere expressions of faith but identity and ideological tools, through which white Christianity intersected with nationalism and exclusion. The article warns of the risk that the sacralization of political discourse may normalize violence and strengthen the links between religion and radical far-right movements[1]. In Europe as well, similar forms of religious revalorization can be observed in phenomena where authority is sacralised. Grzymała-Busse shows that in these contexts, religion provides not only legitimacy but also an organizational infrastructure for the dissemination of conservative messages[2].

This type of politicized religiosity becomes more visible during periods of identity crisis, migration, pandemic, war, when the boundary between faith and ideology blurs. As Casanova observes, religion reemerges in the public sphere not because it becomes more devout, but because it is instrumentalized in the struggle to define public morality[3]. An important dimension of contemporary right-wing radicalization is apocalyptic rhetoric, built on the idea that Christian Europe is threatened by the "replacement" of the native population. This conspiratorial theory, popularized by Renaud Camus and adopted by groups such as Generation Identity, claims that Muslim migration and declining European birth rates will lead to the disappearance of Christian civilization[4]. This vision is not merely a marginal idea: the 2019 ISD report shows that "Great Replacement" narratives have been frequently adopted by mainstream political leaders and publicized without critique, facilitating the normalization of identity-based hatred[5]. Since 2019, European security institutions have been warning about the visible rise of far-right activism, considered one of the most significant emerging threats to the internal stability of Western states. Nationalist radicalization, articulated through messages of cultural purification and the rejection of democratic values, has increasingly manifested in violent actions. Cases in the United Kingdom have often been cited as examples of the transformation of this ideology into a transnational phenomenon, fuelled by online networks and moralizing rhetoric concerning identity and sovereignty[6].

The analysis by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) highlights that the manifesto of the Buffalo attacker combines the "Great Replacement" theory with elements of antisemitism and militant racism, constructing a narrative of defending "white identity" against an alleged global conspiracy. The text employs symbols and viral imagery to disseminate extremist ideology and encourage imitation. In a complementary perspective, sociologists Samuel Perry and Philip Gorski emphasize that white Christian nationalism functions as an exclusivist political theology: freedom is reserved for the similar, order is imposed on others, and violence becomes justified in the name of a sacred mission to "restore" the cultural and moral fabric of the nation[7]. In Juergensmeyer's terms, this

[1] Robert P. Jones, *Facing White Christianity's Role in the January 6th Insurrection*, in Religion Dispatches, January 4, 2022, https://religiondispatches.org/facing-white-christianitys-role-in-the-january-6th-insurrection/ (08.10.2025)
[2] Anna Maria Grzymała-Busse, *Op. cit.*, p. 193
[3] José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, pp. 4-5, 216-221
[4] Jacob Davey, Julia Ebner, *Op. cit.*, pp. 6–8
[5] *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10
[6] Iulian Dinulescu, *Fanatismul religios legionar: de la apariția în România la promovarea de către extrema dreaptă din Statele Unite ale Americii*, Top Form, București, 2020, p. 11
[7] Tahir Abbas, Inés Bolaños Somoano, Joana Cook, Isabelle Frens, Graig R. Klein, Richard McNeil-Willson, *The Buffalo Attack: An Analysis of the Manifesto*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2022, https://icct.nl/publication/buffalo-attack-analysis-manifesto, (08.10.2025); Samuel L. Perry, Philip S. Gorski, *With the Buffalo Massacre, White Christian Nationalism Strikes Again*, The Washington Post, May 20, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/05/20/white-christian-nationalism-buffalo-abortion/ (08.10.2025)

represents a "theology of hate", a reinterpretation of political conflict as a cosmic battle between good and evil, between purity and decay[1]. When morality is defined in cosmic terms, the opposition becomes demonized, and compromise becomes impossible.

In the digital age, religious space moves online, and extremism follows. Recent studies by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) show that Telegram, Gab, and other "alt-tech" platforms function as radicalization ecosystems where religious discourse is remixed with conspiratorial theories and pseudo-theological narratives[2]. In these spaces, religion is reduced to aesthetics and visual identity, stylized crosses, out-of-context Bible quotes, images of medieval knights, used to create a sense of a "sacred community"[3]. Jaskó et al. show, in a comparative study, that far-right groups use religious symbols three times more frequently than left-wing groups[4]. This symbolic oversaturation builds a form of moral solidarity that legitimizes even violent actions.

However, digital radicalization is not a unilateral process. Europol observes that right-wing radicals adopt decentralized, non-hierarchical structures similar to those of anarchist groups, complicating security interventions[5]. At the same time, "religious influencers" in these spaces act as alternative moral authorities, replacing traditional religious institutions[6]. In Eastern Europe, the relationship between religion and the far right has distinct characteristics. In Russia, the Orthodox Church plays a central role in legitimizing imperial discourse and the cultural war[7]. Knox describes how, after 2000, the Russian Orthodox Church was reintegrated into the state project as a source of national identity and morality.[8] Within this logic, opponents are seen not only as "traitors" but also as "sinners," and political struggle becomes a moral crusade. In Poland, the phenomenon of political Catholicism is documented by Grzymała-Busse, who shows how political organizations have used religious symbols to justify anti-LGBT and anti-migration policies, described as "protecting the Christian family"[9]. In both cases, religion no longer functions as a space for reconciliation, but as a front line.

In Romania, recent research shows similar trends: the "Christian-patriotic" discourse has become a rhetorical reference point in anti-COVID-19 restriction mobilizations and anti-minority campaigns. Although physical violence is rare, symbolic violence, hate speech, stigmatization, is increasingly frequent[10]. On a psychological level, religion provides

[1] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 4th Ed. University of California Press, Oakland, 2017, pp. 24-28
[2] Samantha Walther, Andrew McCoy, *Op. cit.*, pp. 100, pp. 114-117
[3] Iulian Dinulescu, *Religion and Politics in the Context of the 6 January 2021 Assault on the US Congress*, "Strategic Impact", No. 2/79, 2021, "Carol I" National Defence University Publishing House Bucharest, Romania, pp. 83-86
[4] Katarzyna Jasko, Gary LaFree, James Piazza, Michael H. Becker, *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-4
[5] Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2021*, pp. 18–19, pp. 81-82, p. 95
[6] Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In defence of an unfashionable theory*, pp. 9, 28-30, 48, 88, 175; Iulian Dinulescu, *Motivation of Qanon Conspiracy Theories Appropriation by Christians and the Expansion of the Phenomenon in 2022*, "Strategic Impact", No. 2, 2022, "Carol I" National Defence University Publishing House Bucharest, Romania, pp. 72-84; Iulian Dinulescu, *The Interference of the Far-Right Ideology Qanon with Christianity*, in "Strategic Impact", No. 1/78, 2021, "Carol I" National Defence University Publishing House Bucharest, Romania, pp. 118-134
[7] Iulian Dinulescu, *Between the Sacred and the Violent: The Russian Imperial Movement and the New Paradigm of Terrorism*, Studia Securitatis. No. 2, December 2024, p. 70
[8] Zoe Knox, *Op. cit.* pp. 533-545
[9] Anna Maria Grzymała-Busse, *Op. cit.*, p. 185, p. 192, p. 223, p. 235
[10] Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, *Illiberal discourse in Romania: the year of exception 2020*, https://www.freiheit.org/romania-and-republic-moldova/illiberal-discourse-romania-year-exception-2020,

frameworks of meaning and intuitive moral foundations, which can be diverted to justify exclusion. Haidt shows that morality based on loyalty, authority, and purity (as opposed to morality based on liberty and equality) correlates significantly with conservative orientations[1]. When these foundations become absolute, moral difference becomes ontological difference.

Thus, in religious right-wing extremism, exclusion becomes an act of purification, and hatred becomes an expression of virtue. This is a phenomenon described by Arendt in terms of "totalitarian morality", a system in which good is no longer debatable but imposed. In this logic, hate speech is not perceived as violence, but as a "painful truth" necessary for collective salvation[2].

Religion, in its own instrumentalized form, provides the far right with moral legitimacy, collective identity, and a framework for mobilization. It simultaneously becomes a source of solidarity and a justification for exclusion. In the context of a world perceived as chaotic and corrupt, the appeal to the sacred offers meaning and order, even if the cost is the delegitimization of the other. This sacralization of identity creates the ground for what we will analyse in the next chapter, the reverse transformation: how radical secularism and anti-religion can themselves become secular religions, with their own dogmas and rituals, producing a dangerous symmetry in the dynamics of contemporary hatred.

Radical Secularism and the Far Left: Ideology as a Secular Religion

If the far right legitimizes itself through the sacralization of religious identity, the contemporary far left defines itself through a sacralization of reason, progress, and social justice. In both cases, we are dealing with forms of moral absolutism, but the direction is reversed: instead of God, the far left elevates "humanity" or "equality" to the status of transcendent principles.[3] This dynamic was described as early as the 20th century by Eric Voegelin, who defined communism and other totalizing ideologies as "political religions", secular systems of salvation that promise the rebirth of society through the sacrifice of the present.[4] In the postmodern world, this form of godless belief manifests in other ways: absolutist activism, cancel culture, and the demonization of any ideological dissent.

In contemporary terms, Habermas called this phenomenon "militant post-secularism", a reaction by secularists who, instead of accepting value pluralism, turn rationality itself into an exclusivist dogma.[5] Classical secularism emerged as a reaction to clerical domination and promoted freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state. However, in the 21st century, we are witnessing an ideological shift: from a moderate secularism (which tolerates belief) to a militant secularism, which sees religion as a moral and epistemic obstacle[6].

(10.10.2025); Cristian Barna, Iulian Dinulescu, *Reziliența instituțională la efectele pandemiei în plan societal*, in "Geopolitica", Vol. XIX, No. 86/1, 2021, pp. 135–143

[1] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, Pantheon Books, New York, 2012, pp. 176-179

[2] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1951, pp. 245, pp. 310-312

[3] John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2007, pp. 26-31, 38

[4] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952, pp. 110-112, 175-176

[5] Jürgen Habermas, *Notes on Post-Secular Society*, New Perspectives Quarterly, Volume 25, Issue 4, October 2008, pp. 24-26

[6] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge-Massachusetts and London-England, 2007, pp. 46, pp. 63-64, p. 68, p. 414, p. 434, p. 491, pp. 525-535

Christopher Hitchens (in 2007) and Richard Dawkins (in 2006), through works such as "God Is Not Great"[1] and "The God Delusion"[2], discursively legitimized a form of militant anti-theism, presenting religion as the primary source of violence and social regression. This perspective fueled cultural currents that no longer separate criticism of religion from the stigmatization of the religious, producing a demonization of faith similar, paradoxically, to the demonization of secularists by the religious right[3]. On the political level, this ideology is reflected in neo-Marxist, anarchist, and eco-radical currents, where "salvation" is redefined: it is no longer transcendental but socio-economic, ecological, or moral. Cases such as the Extinction Rebellion movement or the radical segments of liberal, environmentalist, and antifa movements adopt symbolic structures and rituals typical of religion: initiation, collective guilt, and purification through action.[4] Peter Berger describes secularization not as the disappearance of faith, but as a reorientation of the sacred toward other domains: the nation, science, and social justice. In this sense, the radical left transforms politics into social theology, with its own absolute morality and its own dogmas[5].

Durkheim argued that society itself is the object of "religious" worship, and in the contemporary world, this "society" is replaced by "humanity." Thus, theological terms reappear in secular discourse: "conversion" becomes "raising social consciousness," "sin" becomes "privilege," and "salvation" transforms into "universal equality".[6] In academic and activist circles, this new secular religion generates a Manichaean morality: between the "good" (progressives, aware of structural injustices) and the "evil" (conservatives, privileged, or "unwoke")[7]. Thus, criticism becomes heresy, and disagreement-immorality.

Although contemporary radical left publicly distances itself from violence, its history contains numerous episodes of "salvific violence".[8] In his view, the destruction of the existing order is a condition for rebirth, an idea echoed by Žižek, who stated that "Stalinist communists 'without God' are the ultimate proof of this: everything was permitted to them, as they perceived themselves as direct instruments of their divinity, of the Historical Necessity of Progress toward Communism".[9] This logic justifies symbolic and cultural aggressiveness, cancel culture, the marginalization of conservatives or believers, as acts of "moral purification". Online, secular radicals adopt an evangelical tone: calls for "awakening", "public confessions" (self-critical posts), and collective excommunications. As Haidt and Lukianoff note, American academic culture has produced a "moral tribalism", where activism

[1] Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, Twelve Books, New York, Boston, 2007
[2] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Bantam Press, UK, 2006
[3] Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*, Walter de Gruyter, Inc., Boston, Berlin, 2014, pp. 132-134
[4] José Pedro Zúquete, *Missionary Politics in Contemporary Europe*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse – New York, 2007, pp. 47-54, 84, 94, 113; José Pedro Zúquete, *Missionary Politics – A Contribution to the Study of Populism*, "Religion Compass", Vol. 7, No. 7, 2013, pp. 263-271; F&A Series: *The Religion of Extinction Rebellion,* Religion in Public, University of Leeds, 2020, https://religioninpublic.leeds.ac.uk/2020/01/23/fa-series-the-religion-of-extinction-rebellion (08.10.2025)
[5] Peter L. Berger, *The Many Op. cit.*, pp. 73-77, pp. 114-120, pp. 126-128
[6] Émile Durkheim, *Op. cit.*, pp. 215, p. 207, pp. 222-227, p. 305, p. 429
[7] Helen Lewis, *How Social Justice Became a New Religion - Our society is becoming less religious. Or is it?*, "The Atlantic", August 18, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/08/social-justice-new-religion/671172 (08.10.2025); Wes Carpenter, *Woke Religion: Unmasking the False Gospel of Social Justice*, Ambassador International, Greenville South-USA and Belfat-Northern Ireland, 2021, pp. 25-30
[8] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Viking Press, New York, 1963, pp. 42, p. 261
[9] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Picador, New York, 2008, p. 136

becomes a ritual of virtue[1]. These dynamics are not merely symbolic. Anarchist or eco-terrorist groups such as the Earth Liberation Front or Animal Liberation Front have justified arson and property destruction in the name of "protecting life", a form of secularized "sacred violence"[2].

The Internet has amplified this form of secular moralism. Pew Research Centre studies show that online activism relies on affective mechanisms similar to religion: belonging, guilt, and moral affirmation.[3] Hashtags become symbols of faith, and algorithms amplify moral outrage, creating an environment of constant purification. Evans and Evans observe that in progressive digital cultures, moral identity is externalized and legitimized through public practices of affirmation, becoming a performative act of recognition. Like religious rituals, the act of virtue signalling becomes a form of penance, and the purification of those deemed guilty, a form of social exorcism[4]. In this sense, radical secularism does not eliminate religion but reincarnates it in other forms, using the same emotional and cognitive structures. As John Gray notes, "secular thought is largely composed of repressed religion"[5], because "contemporary atheism is a continuation of monotheism by other means"[6]. Gray raises the question of whether atheists can truly eliminate the monotheistic residues from their own models of human meaning. His answer is negative: he argues that secular humanism preserves, in a translated form, the theological structure of monotheism, substituting divinity with the idea of a sacralised "humanity." A genuine abolition of theology, Gray asserts, would need to begin by challenging this fundamental belief in the unity and centrality of the human species—a belief that continues to function as a form of secular religion, difficult to abandon even for contemporary atheist thought.[7] Contrary to the Enlightenment ideal of tolerance, radical secular left often adopts a form of symbolic intolerance toward faith. In France, for example, laïcité policies have been reinterpreted in terms of "ideological purity", leading to the banning of religious symbols in schools or in public spaces. Bowen shows that this transformation of *laïcité* has shifted from neutrality to "republican puritanism".[8] In academic settings, recent research shows that religious professors and students avoid expressing their faith for fear of stigmatization. Thus, value pluralism is replaced by moral uniformity.[9] This "dogma of rationality" produces effects similar to religious fundamentalism: rigid moralism, stigmatization, and exclusion. As Hunter concludes, the cultural conflict is not between religion and secularism, but between two forms of absolute morality, one theistic and one humanist[10].

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[1] Greg Lukianoff, Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*, Penguin Press, 2018, pp. 2, pp. 7-11, p. 84, pp. 92-94, p. 101

[2] Stefan H. Leader, Peter Probst, *The Earth Liberation Front and Environmental Terrorism*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", Vol. 15, No. 4, 2003, pp. 37–58

[3] Janna Anderson, Lee Rainie, *The Future of Digital Spacesand Their Role in Democracy*, "Pew Research Center", 2021, p. 3, pp. 7-8, pp. 10-11, https://eloncdn.blob.core.windows.net/eu3/sites/964/2021/11/Future-Social-Media-Democracy-In-2035-Elon-University-Pew-Research-2021.pdf (11.10.2025)

[4] John H. Evans, Michael S. Evans, *Religion and Science: Beyond the Epistemological Conflict Narrative*, "Annual Review of Sociology", Vol. 34, 2008, pp. 87-105

[5] John Gray, *Seven Types of Atheism*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2018, p. 72

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 158

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 157

[8] John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2007, pp. 3-4, p. 187, p. 274

[9] Baylee A. Edwards, Chloe Bowen, M. Elizabeth Barnes, Sara E. Brownell, *Christian Student Experiences During Peer Interactions in Undergraduate Biology Courses*, "CBE-Life Sciences Education", Vol. 23, No. 1, Art. 7, pp. 1-19, https://www.lifescied.org/doi/epdf/10.1187/cbe.23-01-0020 (11.10.2025)

[10] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, Basic Books, New York, 1991, p. 42

Radical secularism and the political left are not merely political movements but contemporary expressions of an anthropological need for the sacred. They redefine salvation, sin, and community in social, rather than transcendent, terms. Like religious extremism, secular radicalism produces exclusion, intolerance, and moralized hatred. In place of God rises Humanity; in place of sin, privilege; in place of hell, inequality. Thus, the confrontation between the religious far-right and the secular far-left is not a conflict between faith and reason, but between two rival moral religions, each claiming a monopoly on the good. This conflictual relationship, analysed in the next chapter "Mutual Hatred and the Sacred–Profane Conflict", will demonstrate how the dichotomy between these two forms of absolutism fuels global radicalization and the ideological violence of the present.

Mutual Hatred and the Sacred–Profane Conflict

The religious far-right and the secular far-left function as mirror images of the same psychological structure: both define the world in terms of absolute good and absolute evil, both demand total loyalty, and both sacralise the struggle against the other. Haidt observes that modern moral polarization is not about rational disagreement, but about the collision of two incompatible moral sacredness's.[1] For the radical right, the sacred is tradition, religion, and the nation; for the radical left, the sacred is equality, liberty, and social justice. In both cases, the profane is the other: the immigrant, the capitalist, the atheist, or the believer. This symmetry produces what Hunter called "culture wars", not mere ideological disputes, but total moral confrontations where no compromise is possible[2].

When values become sacred, conflict becomes impossible to negotiate. Atran and Ginges have empirically shown that individuals who perceive a value as "sacred" refuse any material compromise, even when the cost is high[3]. In contemporary politics, both the far right and the far left transform ideological confrontation into a liturgy of moral purity. Each camp constructs an apocalyptic narrative: the right speaks of the "decay of Christian civilization," while the left warns of the "systemic collapse of patriarchy and capitalism". Gray called these structures "apocalyptic utopias," noting that modernity has secularized the religious apocalypse into political forms: "the final revolution", "the classless society", "the moral rebirth of the nation".[4] Haidt and Fiske & Rai show that political hatred is fueled by intuitive moral mechanisms rather than reasoning. The mutual animosity between the extremes stems from the perception that the other not only errs but also profanes the sacredness of one's own group. For the religious far right, the secular left embodies "decadence," the "destruction of the family," and "moral atheism". For the secular far left, the religious right represents "theocratic fascism", "patriarchal oppression" and "disregard for science"[5]. This mechanism of mutual demonization is a classic process of othering, transforming the adversary into the non-human. Staub observes that "moral genocide" begins with the moral delegitimization of the other, not with physical violence[6].

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[1] Jonathan Haidt, *Op. cit.*, pp. 118, pp. 350-357, p. 364, p. 419
[2] James Davison Hunter, *Op. cit.*, p. 52
[3] Scott Atran, Jeremy Ginges, *Religious and Sacred Imperatives in Human Conflict*, Science, Vol. 336, No. 6083, 2012, p. 855
[4] John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, pp. 30-34
[5] Jonathan Haidt, *Op. cit.*; Alan Page Fiske, Tage Shakti Rai, *Virtuous Violence: Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015
[6] Ervin Staub, *Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict, and Terrorism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2011, p. 17

The analysis of digital discourse over the past two decades highlights a symmetry in language: both sides use religious terms, but with opposite meanings. As Jakob Schwörer (2024) emphasizes, contemporary political discourse in the digital environment increasingly employs religious references, both in conservative and progressive spaces, transforming ideological confrontation into a moralized symbolic field. From this perspective, both sides reinterpret religious concepts to confer transcendent meaning on their own political causes[1]. In both cases, language becomes a ritual of purification. Words no longer communicate facts but create moral belonging. This dynamic is characteristic of what Berger called "sacralized pluralism", a world in which each group constructs its own complete moral cosmos, impermeable to argument[2].

Digital platforms have become the main catalyst of this confrontation. Bail's studies show that social networks create "moral echo chambers," where users are constantly exposed only to positions that confirm their beliefs, amplifying hatred and contempt toward the opposition[3]. In this context, the reciprocal hatred between the extremes becomes a digital ritual. Outrage, moralizing irony, and symbolic attacks turn into forms of social capital – precisely as Bourdieu described cultural capital[4]. Thus, the sacred–profane conflict no longer occurs only in physical spaces (streets, parliaments) but in the digital realm of performative virtue, where "canceling" and "shaming" become equivalents of religious excommunication[5]. Interestingly, although the extremes perceive themselves as opposites, they share the same logic of moral violence. Juergensmeyer shows that religious and radical secular violence are symmetrical in their justification: both believe that purification can be achieved through destruction[6]. Thus, a far-right attacker invokes the "salvation of the nation", while a violent far-left activist invokes the "liberation of humanity". In both cases, violence becomes sacred, and the death of the opponent, a "moral victory"[7].

This justificatory symmetry has also been documented by Jaskó et al., who showed that both right-wing and left-wing groups justify violence through a "moral obligation", albeit in the name of different values[8]. Extreme polarization operates through mechanisms of reciprocal reaction. Studies by Kalmoe and Mason show that political hatred ("affective polarization") is the strongest predictor of support for violent actions, regardless of ideological orientation[9]. This dynamic manifests as a form of symmetrical radicalization: the right responds to the "woke dictatorship" with calls for a "holy culture war," while the left responds to "religious bigotry" with calls for the "moral purification of society"[10]. Each act of

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[1] Jakob Schwörer, *Religious references in political campaigning: A comparative analysis of Latin America and Western Europe on social media*, "Frontiers in Political Science", Vol. 6, Art. 1470264, 2024, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1470264

[2] Peter L. Berger, *Op. cit.*, pp. 88-90

[3] Chris Bail, *Breaking the Social Media Prism: How to Make Our Platforms Less Polarizing*, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford, 2021, pp. 29-30

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *The forms of capital*, in J. Richardson (Ed.), "Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education", Greenwood Press, New York, 1986, pp. 241–258

[5] Greg Lukianoff, Jonathan Haidt, *Op. cit.*, p. 62, p. 93, p. 172

[6] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Op. cit*, pp. 24-33

[7] *Ibidem*, pp. 4-5, p. 167, p. 205, p. 211, p. 269

[8] Katarzyna Jasko, Gary LaFree, James Piazza, Michael H. Becker, *A comparison of political violence by left-wing, right-wing and Islamist extremists in the United States and the world*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), (comparative analysis), "Psychological and Cognitive Sciences", Vol. 119, No. 30, July 18, 2022, p.1, https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2122593119 (07.10.2025)

[9] Nathan P. Kalmoe, Liliana Mason, *Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2022, p. 49

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 167

exclusion fuels the next. In the long term, the result is not the hegemony of one side, but the degradation of the shared space of meaning. As Arendt warned, totalitarianism does not begin with state violence, but with the "death of the common space of truth"[1].

Both extremes share a theology of hatred, even if one is religious and the other secular. In both cases, hatred is not a flaw, but a moral virtue: proof of loyalty to the truth. For the right, hatred of "infidels" and "immorals" is an expression of love for God. For the left, hatred of "reactionaries" and "oppressors" is an expression of love for humanity. Thus, hatred becomes a sacred act, in the inverted ethics of extremism, hatred is no longer the opposite of love, but the means through which love for the absolute is affirmed, by negating the profane[2]. In the modern era, evil has been secularized, the place of religious demons has been taken by the moral figures of the "corrupt", the "oppressors", or the "traitors", yet the ritual of collective exorcism, expressed through public condemnation and purification, continues to operate within the same symbolic registers[3].

At the global level, this symmetrical moral polarization creates security vulnerabilities. European strategic analysis services warn that the hybrid violence of ideologically motivated groups (religious right, anarchists, eco-extremists) is becoming increasingly difficult to anticipate, as it is based on absolute moral justifications[4]. In the United States, strategic assessments by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have identified the existence of "domestic violent extremists" (DVE) from both major ideological orientations, right and left, characterized by autonomous network structures, lacking centralized hierarchies, yet interconnected through shared narratives and a sense of moral mission. Federal documents emphasize that these groups mutually reinforce one another, constructing a mistico-political rhetoric that sacralises social conflict and grants violence an absolute moral justification. In both cases, polarized digital environments and fragmented information ecosystems play a crucial role in amplifying the perception of a "total moral war", where the ideological struggle is experienced as an existential battle between good and evil[5]. Thus, the sacred-profane confrontation transcends the cultural sphere and becomes a direct threat to democratic security.

The reciprocal hatred between the religious far right and the secular far left is the contemporary expression of a fundamental anthropological tension: the confrontation between the sacred and the profane. Each camp sacralises its own ideal and profanes the other's. Each sees in the adversary not just an opponent, but a blasphemy. In a globalized and digitalized world, this symmetry is amplified through algorithmic logic, producing radicalization, intolerance, and symbolic violence. As Bauman observes, "liquid modernity" has not dissolved the sacred, it has merely redistributed it across multiple, competing

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Brace and Co., New York, 1951, pp. 474-478
[2] Rafał Leśniczak, *Hate speech from the perspective of the mediatization of religion in the post-secular age. A few remarks for discussion*, "Methaodos.revista de ciencias sociales", Vol.11, No. 1, 2023, pp. 1-9, http://dx.doi.org/10.17502/mrcs.v11i1.635
[3] John Gray, *Op. cit.*, pp. 75-91
[4] Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT 2024)*, European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, The Hague, pp. 7-9, 22, 33-34, 52, https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2024-eu-te-sat, (14.10.2025)
[5] Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism*, May 2021, pp. 2, 5-9, p. 14, https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/counterterrorism/fbi-dhs-domestic-terrorism-strategic-report.pdf/view (14.10.2025)

spheres[1]. When these sacred values come into conflict, the result is not pluralism, but total moral war. In the following chapter, "Moral Reintegration and the Possibility of Post-Extremist Dialogue", we will examine the possible pathways for depolarization and the reconstruction of a shared moral space, in which religiosity and secularism no longer serve as instruments of hatred, but as resources for social reconciliation.

Moral Reintegration and the Possibility of Post-Extremist Dialogue

After the 20th century, marked by totalizing ideologies, the beginning of the 21st century seems caught in a revival of moral absolutism. The radical right sacralizes tradition and faith, the radical left sacralizes equality and total freedom, and the common space for deliberation collapses between them. Yet, as Habermas warned (as early as 2005), "modernity cannot survive without a reciprocal translation between reason and faith". Habermas formulates the concept of *translation proviso*, asserting that a modern democratic society requires reciprocal translations between the rational-secular language and the religious language in order to maintain civic cohesion[2]. If rationality becomes completely separated from morality, or religion is entirely divorced from pluralism, the result is not freedom, but disintegration. Reason isolated from morality and religion detached from pluralism, Habermas argues, lead to social fragmentation and disintegration, not to liberty. Therefore, post-extremist moral reintegration does not imply relativism, but the reconstruction of a shared framework of meaning, where the plurality of values does not undermine cohesion, but strengthens it. Habermas speaks of moral reintegration within a common framework of meaning, in which the plurality of values is not a threat, but a condition for civic solidarity[3].

Current polarization is not only ideological but also affective and identity-based. McCoy and Somer describe affective polarization as a process in which citizens come to hate one another, perceiving each other not as political rivals, but as existential threats. They define "pernicious polarization" as a process through which society fractures into two opposing camps, between which trust disappears and loyalty to the group becomes absolute[4]. McCoy and Somer argue that, in this way, the affective form of polarization emerges, when citizens no longer perceive others as legitimate opponents, but as moral enemies or existential threats[5]. This dynamic is amplified by algorithms and social networks, where the "moral reward" comes from outrage rather than understanding[6]. Thus, polarization becomes self-sustaining: each expression of hatred generates emotional recurrence and reinforces membership in one's own moral group. As Sunstein (2017) shows, isolated ideological groups tend to become more radical internally, even without contact with the opposition, a phenomenon called "group polarization"[7]. Therefore, depolarization cannot be purely rational; it must also be emotional and moral, capable of restoring trust between communities.

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[1] Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, Polity Press, Cambridge-UK; Malden-MA, 2011, p. 74, pp. 87-88

[2] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2008, pp. 131-133

[3] *Ibidem*, pp. 134-137

[4] Jennifer McCoy, Murat Somer, *Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How It Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science", Vol. 681, No. 1, 2019, pp. 236–237

[5] *Ibidem*, pp. 238-239

[6] Christopher A. Bail, *Breaking the Social Media Prism: How to Make Our Platforms Less Polarizing*, Princeton University Press, Princeton&Oxford, 2021, pp. 48-49

[7] Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2017, pp. 70-71

Habermas proposes the concept of a "post-secular translation", a dialogue between believers and non-believers, in which each side expresses its values in a language intelligible to the other. He discusses what he calls "the post-secular society" and introduces the idea of a reciprocal translation process ("translation proviso" or "post-secular translation"), through which:

- believers must express their religious convictions in a language that is accessible and rational to all citizens;
- secularists (non-believers) must, in turn, show cognitive willingness to understand the rational content of religious arguments[1].

This process does not require abandoning one's convictions, but rather recognizing the limits of one's own horizon. Habermas clarifies that this post-secular dialogue does not demand the relinquishing of religious beliefs or secular convictions, but the acknowledgment of the boundaries of each form of rationality and the necessity of mutual translation to ensure democratic cohesion[2]. Taylor complements this perspective, asserting that the moral pluralism of the modern world cannot be "solved", but only "navigated" through practices of respect and dialogue[3]. In this view, diversity is not a threat but an epistemic resource: each perspective contributes a moral dimension of truth. Moral reintegration, therefore, entails:

1. Redefining sacredness - from an exclusive absolute to a shared sacredness of human dignity[4];
2. Institutionalizing moral dialogue - interreligious, civic, and educational spaces for the translation of values[5];
3. Reflective education - cultivating critical consciousness, empathy, and moral literacy[6].

In the current context of social fragmentation and public trust crises, contemporary literature proposes several models of reconciliation aimed at restoring moral and civic bonds between individuals and communities. Among these, three directions have emerged as major reference points in recent thought:

a) The deliberative model (Habermas, 1996) – in liberal democracies, the public sphere must remain open and rational, but not morally sterile. Habermas argues that deliberative democracy functions only if citizens have moral trust in one another.[7] This entails:

- norms of dialogue based on reciprocity[8];
- understanding the difference between critique and contempt[9];
- institutions that reward collaboration rather than conflict[10].

b) The model of secular compassion (Nussbaum, 2010) – Nussbaum proposes the idea of "secular compassion" – the capacity to recognize another's suffering without necessarily sharing their system of beliefs[11]. This forms the basis of an ethics of common humanity, capable of transcending religious or ideological barriers.

c) The model of "cross-cutting communities". Putnam and Campbell showed that in pluralistic societies, moral stability depends on the existence of "cross-cutting communities",

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[1] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, pp. 131-132
[2] *Ibidem*, p. 133
[3] Charles Taylor, *Op. cit.*, pp. 303-305
[4] Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities,* Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2010, pp. 79-94
[5] *Ibidem*, pp. 27-46
[6] *Ibidem*, pp. 95-120
[7] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, pp. 272-274
[8] *Ibidem*, pp. 305-307
[9] *Ibidem*, pp. 309-310
[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 488-490
[11] Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Op. cit.*, pp. 37-38, p. 45, pp. 80-83

networks in which individuals from different ideological camps cooperate for shared goals. Such networks reduce stereotypes and rebuild bridging social capital, as opposed to bonding capital, which reinforces exclusion[1]. Together, these perspectives shape a complex framework for contemporary reconciliation, in which deliberative reasoning, moral empathy, and social solidarity become complementary components of the same process of democratic regeneration.

Religion, often perceived as a source of conflict, can become a vector for peacebuilding. Appleby shows that religious traditions contain not only justifications for violence but also internal resources for peace, "the ambivalent potential of the sacred"[2]. Initiatives such as Sant'Egidio (Italy) or Religions for Peace demonstrate that interreligious networks can function as moral infrastructures for reconciliation, bringing together clergy, laity, and secular activists. According to Appleby, Sant'Egidio operates as a "moral infrastructure for reconciliation" through concrete actions in Mozambique, Algeria, and the Balkans,[3] while WCRP (today "Religions for Peace"), including its collaboration with the UN, plays an important role in advancing global interreligious dialogue[4]. Along the same lines, Juergensmeyer argues that only the recognition of the spiritual dimension of conflict allows for the "symbolic deactivation of violence"[5]. Therefore, religion should not be excluded from the public sphere, but translated into a common ethical language accessible even to non-believers. Habermas argues that, in a post-secular democratic society, religion should not be excluded from the public sphere; rather, it must participate in civic dialogue by translating its moral content into a secular language shared by all citizens[6].

On the other hand, secularism should not be understood as anti-religion, but as a framework for pluralistic coexistence. Asad emphasizes that secularism is a specific historical product, not a moral universal, and that it can become oppressive when it absolutizes its own norms[7]. Secularism "arose in modern Euro-America", and although it claims universality, it has a specific historical origin, being the product of a Western political and intellectual tradition.[8] Secularism is not a universal condition of modernity, but a doctrine with particular roots and power effects, capable of becoming oppressive when it presents its norms as neutral and universal[9]. Asad explicitly states that "the concept of 'the secular' today is part of a doctrine called secularism" and that it "builds on a particular conception of the world", meaning it is not based on a universal truth but on a historically situated construction[10].

Therefore, a mature secular culture does not reject the sacred but translates it into values of dignity, freedom, and compassion. Gray suggests that true secularity does not mean the absence of faith, but the awareness of the "plurality of possible beliefs"[11]. According to Gray, "new atheism" and secularism are often confused with the absence of faith[12]. Thus, reflexive secularism becomes a moral space of convergence, not exclusion. Depolarization cannot ignore the digital environment. Online platforms shape moral perceptions, defining who is "sacred" and

[1] Robert D. Putnam, David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Simon&Schuster, New York, 2012, pp. 526-528
[2] R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford, 2000, pp. 29-30
[3] *Ibidem*, pp. 157-164
[4] *Ibidem*, pp. 150-153
[5] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 263-266
[6] Jürgen Habermas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 134-136
[7] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2003, p. 23
[8] *Ibidem*, pp. 1-3
[9] *Ibidem*, pp. 182-194
[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 191-193
[11] John Gray, *Op. cit.*, p. 91
[12] *Ibidem*, pp. 3-23

who is "profane". Both Bail and Haidt warn that the current architectures of social networks stimulate outrage rather than dialogue. One solution is algorithmic rehumanization, the redesign of platforms to promote empathy and moral diversity[1]. For example, experiments conducted by Twitter with "context" labels reduced misinformation and aggression by 29%[2]. Digital education and "epistemic courage" are essential for rebuilding a moral culture of conversation, where difference is not a threat but an opportunity for learning[3].

Over the next five years, Europol reports (2024) and Pew Research Center studies (2023 and 2025) estimate an increase in online radicalization centered on moral issues—identity, religion, climate, gender, and sovereignty[4]. Without mechanisms for moral reconciliation, democratic societies risk value atomization and an increase in ideologically motivated violence. Solutions must combine: educational policies for civic-moral literacy, digital platforms with ethical accountability, and an international "moral diplomacy" aimed at reducing tensions between religious and secular identities[5]. Thus, the security of the future depends not only on force, but on society's moral capacity to recognize its diversity as a form of shared wealth. Religiosity and radical secularism are not merely doctrines; they are moral structures of meaning. When absolutized, they become instruments of hatred; when mutually translated, they become instruments of reconciliation. Post-extremist moral reintegration does not entail the disappearance of conflict, but its moral domestication, transforming hatred into productive disagreement, sacrality into respect, and difference into dialogue. As Ricoeur wrote, reconciliation does not erase evil, but gives it a meaning that no longer destroys[6]. This is, perhaps, the ethical challenge of the twenty-first century: to build a society in which the sacred and the profane coexist without moral warfare, within a plurality of meanings united by a shared dignity.

Conclusions

This analysis aimed to clarify one of the most acute tensions of the contemporary world: the confrontation between religiosity and radical secularism in their extreme forms, as a source of moral, ideological, and increasingly security-related polarization. At the center of this confrontation is not merely a dispute of ideas, but the clash of two moral frameworks, each defining in its own way what constitutes good, truth, and legitimate order.

The main conclusion is that religious and secular extremes do not oppose each other by nature, but through the absolutization of their own values and the refusal of moral pluralism. Radical right-wing movements sacralise tradition, faith, and national identity, transforming them into instruments of exclusion and defence of an order perceived as divine.

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[1] Chris Bail, *Op. cit.*, pp. ix–xii; pp. 130-133; Jonathan Haidt, *Op. cit.*, pp. 311-326

[2] Twitter Transparency Report, *Quarterly Data on Behavioral Interventions and Content Moderation*, 2023, p. 4, https://transparency.x.com/content/dam/transparency-twitter/2024/x-global-transparency-report-h1.pdf, (15.10.2025)

[3] Jonathan Haidt, *Op. cit.*, pp. 19-22; pp. 320-326; pp. 365-371

[4] Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT 2024)*, p, 38; Richard Wike, Janell Fetterolf, Jonathan Schulman, Sofia Hernandez Ramones, *Attitudes toward reforming the political system*, "Pew Research Center", 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/2025/09/15/attitudes-toward-reforming-the-political-system/ (17.10.2025); Moira Fagan, Maria Smerkovich, Andrew Prozorovsky, *Americans' views of global threats differ by party, age*, "Pew Research Center", 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/19/americans-views-of-global-threats-differ-by-party-age/ (17.10.2025); Janna Anderson, Lee Rainie, *Themes: The most harmful or menacing changes in digital life that are likely by 2035*, "Pew Research Center", 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/06/21/themes-the-most-harmful-or-menacing-changes-in-digital-life-that-are-likely-by-2035/ (17.10.2025)

[5] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 256-281

[6] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1992, pp. 247-248

Radical left-wing movements sacralise equality, reason, and social justice, treating them as absolute moral imperatives and rejecting value differences. In both cases, the sacred becomes a weapon: what is faith for one camp becomes superstition for the other; what is freedom for one side becomes profanation for the other. This symmetry generates a self-destructive dynamic: the right asserts itself through opposition to secularism, the left through opposition to religion. Instead of moral balance, contemporary society develops two totalizing moralities in constant and increasingly unnegotiable conflict.

Polarization is amplified by the digital environment and media infrastructure: social networks, recommendation algorithms, and fragmented information ecosystems turn outrage into a reward and moral anger into a sign of virtue. In these spaces, religion and secularism no longer serve as modes of reflection but as identity markers that segment and hierarchize incompatible camps. Contemporary extremism becomes more emotional than ideological, feeding on resentment, fear, and the need for moral certainty. Both religion and ideology function as instruments of cohesion and justification for action, even violent, where hatred becomes a form of loyalty and intolerance a proof of virtue.

However, the analysis shows that each form of sacrality also holds the potential for reconciliation. Religion, freed from political instrumentalization, can foster solidarity, compassion, and community meaning; secularism, liberated from militant reflexes, provides the critical space for coexistence and freedom of conscience. Confrontation becomes dangerous only when each camp loses the capacity for self-reflection and perceives itself as absolute truth.

The civic stakes are thus high: societies that fail to manage moral plurality risk fragmenting into parallel community's incapable of cooperation and trust. The loss of a shared space for dialogue equates to the loss of democracy. Solutions cannot be merely punitive but must be restorative, cantered on education, dialogue, and the rehumanization of social relations. From this perspective, several strategic directions emerge:

- Rehabilitating moral dialogue - creating institutional and civic spaces where religious and secular voices can coexist without demonization.
- Education for pluralism - developing the capacity to understand and respect moral differences through moral, digital, and civic literacy.
- Rebuilding institutional trust - restoring the moral authority of the state and civil society through example and transparency.
- Responsibility in digital spaces - redesigning communication platforms as moral spaces, protecting pluralism and limiting the amplification of hatred.
- Promoting civic empathy - recognizing the dignity of others as the foundation of a public ethics of coexistence.

Overall, radical religiosity and secularism are two faces of the same modern crisis of meaning. The problem is not sacrality itself, but its manifestation without awareness of its limits. When the sacred is not tempered by moral reflection, it turns into dogma, and dogma into violence. Reconciliation does not mean eliminating difference but accepting reflective coexistence: authentic religiosity and mature secularism can coexist within human dignity, where meaning is shared, not monopolized.

Depolarization does not require abandoning convictions but learning the art of living with difference. Hatred does not generate stability; mutual recognition does. The society of the future will be more united not because people think alike, but because they can disagree without hatred. In a world where everything tends to be moralized, true virtue lies in transforming morality into dialogue, not into a weapon. This is the essential stake: the moral

rehumanization of the contemporary world through the balance between faith and reason, between the sacred and the profane, between conviction and doubt.

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