Islamic influencers and secularism

An examination of two Islamic thinkers and their attitude towards secularism

Engaging the Secular Mind

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1.Introduction

The social, technological and economic imbalance between Islamic and Western countries, which is visible at various levels, has led to different reactions among Muslims. A popular thesis among many Muslims is the assumption that the prevailing Western culture is Islamic in its foundations but has moved away from this originally Islamic culture due to materialistic and other influences that are seen as negative (Nagel 2014:225). Traditionalist circles strongly disagree with this and locate the backwardness of the Islamic world in a departure from Islamic religious practice and lifestyle. This is accompanied by a radicalization of the rejection of everything non-Islamic that has become stronger over the centuries and the political efforts of traditionalist and Islamist groups, some of which have been crowned with success (:225). The conviction of the moral and social superiority of Islam over Western civilization is also a defining theme in these circles (:225). Particularly in the Western world itself, Muslim voices are becoming more audible and direct, critically examining the ways of thinking and living of modernity. While the field of tension between secularism and religion in the Western world over the last few centuries has primarily focused on Christianity, Islam has now become much more central. Muslims constitute a considerable proportion of the population in many European countries and are increasingly making their presence felt in the public sphere in various ways. One significant area of this public space is the social media platform YouTube, on which numerous different Muslim channels, speakers and preachers are active. Much of their content is aimed more at Muslims and deals, for example, with the practical faith practices of Muslims and theological topics. Other content has a missionary orientation and aims to demonstrate the truth and superiority of Islam in various ways. There is also often a critical examination of various religions, especially Christianity, but also non-religious world views. This includes secularism, whose influence is seen as a threat to social coexistence and the spirituality of Muslim individuals and Islamic societies. Among the most important Muslim critics in the Western world are Daniel Haqiqatjou and Abdullah Al Andalusi. Their public work is not limited to their YouTube content but extends to public debates, written publications in media and

print form, and teaching units that they pass on in various Islamic institutes. The task of this coursework will be to work out the philosophical and theological convictions on which their critical engagement with secularism is based. To this end, I will use some of their thematically relevant videos and written publications as examples and determine which social model they have in mind instead of secularism. Furthermore, their critical perspective on secularism will be identified and brought into conversation with Charles Taylor's thesis. A further task will be to identify the similarities and differences between a biblical-theological critique of secularism and the critique of the influencers examined. In a subsequent conclusion, I will make a personal assessment.

2. Background

2.1. Daniel Haqiatjou

According to the description on his website, Daniel Haqiatjou was born into a liberal, secular family in Houston, Texas, but turned to a traditionalist understanding of Islam in the course of his life (Muslim Skeptic 2024). He founded the "Alasna Institute" which claims to have made it its mission to help its students understand modernism, atheism, liberalism, scientism and all other ideologies that attack Islam on a "deep level" through various online courses .[1] He regularly holds debates with non-Muslims in which he defends his traditional, conservative understanding of Islam and tries to show the superiority of Islam over western worldviews and ways of life.

2.2. Abdullah al Andalusi

On his website, Abdullah al Andalusi is presented as an "international Muslim thinker, speaker and debater" (Al Andalusi 2024). In addition to a variety of Islamic and philosophical topics on which al Andalusi writes and speaks, his critical examination of secularism is cited as one of his main focuses (2024). He is a cofounder of the "Muslim Debate Initiative", on which many of his own debates on

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[1] https://www.alasna.org/

the role and value of secularism can be found, from which I would like to present some of his core arguments below. Like Haqiqatjou, he regularly holds debates with non-Muslims in which he defends his traditional Islamic beliefs and criticizes non-Islamic world views.

3. Subject of criticism: Secularism

To determine the relationship between secularism and the positions of Al Andalusi and Haqiqatjou, it is firstly necessary to define what is meant by secularism. The problem here is that this term is defined and understood differently by different people and groups. In the following, I would therefore like to try to frame the understanding of secularism that Al Andalusi and Haqiqatjou critically examine. The term secularism emerged in the mid-19th century as a self-designation of humanitarian-positivist circles and was coined by the British social reformer Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) (Copson 2017:1). The writer and founder of an atheist journal advocated purely inner-worldly convictions on topics such as morality, philosophy and the organization of society and politics. He coined and associated this approach, which completely eschewed religious considerations and basic assumptions, with the term "secularism" (:1). At the beginning of the 20th century, this developed into a negative category for various theological movements in their confrontation with the worldviews of modernity (Claussen 2004:789). In some cases, it was used as a downright synonym for "godlessness" and negatively charged in a way that did not consider the multi-layered modernization processes that must be perceived in connection with secularism (:789). It must also be noted that secularism and secular ideals have developed differently in different parts of the world from their original exclusively Western context, so that the Indian political scientist Rajeev Bhargava speaks of "multiple secularisms" (Bhargava 2016:19). This fact must be considered when evaluating Al Andalusi's and Haqiatjou's criticism of secularism. Despite the different forms of secularism in different contexts, there are some guidelines from which a generally recognized understanding can be derived. According to Bhargava, religion marks the scope of secularism because, although it is not intrinsically opposed to religion, it is defined by its aim to reduce its influence on society as a whole (:20). The aim of secularism is to ensure

that the social and political order is not dominated by institutionalized religion and that equality and freedom for members of different religions, as well as for non-religious people, are guaranteed in this way (:20). "Secularism" must be distinguished from "secularization" or "secularity" in terms of content. The Islamic scholar Florian Zemmin differentiates the use of these terms as follows:

> "I am using `secularization' for the process of making or becoming secular, `secularity' as the description of the outcome of this process, and `secularism' for normative positions advocating secularization. (Zemmin 2016:309).

These normative positions can be understood as the three parts that make up secularism, according to the French sociologist Jean Baubérot: the separation of religious institutions from state institutions, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the equal treatment of all people regardless of their religious and non-religious worldviews (Copson 2017:2). The National Secular Society (NSS) from the United Kingdom declares the following principles to be fundamental to secularism on its website similarly, but with a clearer evaluation in its definition:

> **Equality** so that our religious beliefs or lack of them doesn't put any of us at an advantage or a disadvantage. **Freedom** to practise one's religion or belief without harming others, or to change it or not have one, according to one's own conscience. **Separation** of religious institutions from state institutions and a public sphere where religion may participate, but not dominate. (National Secular Society 2024)

Both the sub-items listed and their meaning, which in the society's view are part of secularism, correspond to the points that Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi critically address, albeit without their positive connotation. According to the society, "Secularism protects Freedom of Religion or Belief for all.". According to their understanding, secular states strive to guarantee and protect freedom of belief and freedom of religious practice for all citizens (2024). For them, secularism is about democracy and justice. A secular democracy treats all citizens equally before the law, without favoring or disadvantaging certain groups or individuals (2024). In addition, secularism protects freedom of speech and opinion, which includes religious people and their beliefs, without offering them privileged protection (2024). The separation of religion and state is a key principle of secularism and thus guarantees the independence of religious institutions from state influence, as is also the case the other way around (2024). In the course of this work, we will see that

both Haqiaqatjou and Al Andalusi contradict all of these points by questioning their positive characteristics and neutrality. In one lecture, Al Andalusi even refers to a definition of the National Secular Society in his definition of secularism. Although he only lists the "Separation of Church and State," he makes it clear that his discussion of secularism focuses precisely on what the National Secular Society stands for (2014: 05:25-05:40).

4. Contents of the criticism

4.1. Lack of neutrality

A key component of the criticism that Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi make of secularism is that, contrary to what its proponents claim, it does not pursue ideologically neutral goals. Bhargava sees opposition to "oppressive, tyrannical, inegalitarian or exclusionary features" as the main point of secularism (Bhargava 2016:20). This is where the criticism of Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi comes in, who consider it illegitimate if moral convictions are to be enforced with reference to secularism. In their eyes, secularism is misused by liberal forces to implement their own moral ideas. As Haqiqatjou writes, "In reality, however, there is no neutral core that is completely free of the same metaphysics and normativity that is supposedly so objectionable about religion." (Haqiatjou 2022:37). He writes of the "emptiness of the secular," by which he means that proper moral action concerns a metaphysical realm that is covered by religion but not by secularism (:35). In order to be able to make moral judgments, a transcendent foundation is necessary, which does not exist in secularism. At the same time, however, he sees it as unavoidable that legislators necessarily have to make decisions based on moral convictions. Thus, a foundation of values is also decisive for secular and not only theocratic states, both of which make certain moral convictions the subjugating standard for all in the same way (:34). So while secularism pretends to be neutral, it is by no means so in practice. Al Andalusi argues similarly, saying that all laws are based on values and that it is therefore not possible to establish legislation without underlying moral values (Muslim Debate Initiative 2013: 08:00-08:10). In secular societies, secular humanism as a philosophy has become the objective

standard for morality that determines what is good and what is evil. As a result, religious people are always on the losing side and experience disadvantages (2013: 43:14-43:40). Secularism itself offers no morals, so secularists have adopted their beliefs in free will and the equality of all people from Christianity (Muslim Debate Initiative 2011: 12:45-13:10). Secularism does not include metaphysical considerations and religion in society and, contrary to what it claims, does not really believe in the equality of all people (2011: 26:02-26:26). For him, the main difference in the Islamic model is that Islamic laws are based on divine morality. For Al Andalusi, the justice of this is demonstrated by the fact that, unlike secular systems of law, it does not apply to all people but only to Muslims. Sharia law is not a system of laws that would be imposed on all people by force. Under Islamic rule, Jews and Christians would have had their own systems of law. Therefore, under Sharia law, unlike in Western models of a universally valid law, everyone would not be made uniform in a totalitarian manner in the name of egalitarianism (Muslim Debate Initiative 2013: 13:05-13:22). At the same time, however, secularism privileges certain groups, especially rich people, and thus leads to more rather than fewer wars (Muslim Debate Initiative 2011: 14:02-14:53).

4.2. Democracy, sharia and caliphate

Al Andalusi and Haqiqatjou combine their criticism of secularism with a criticism of the model of secular democracy. For both, this manifests a series of problems that, in their understanding, are linked to its lack of transcendental reference. Haqiqatjou recognizes a real danger to the faith of Muslims in the assumption that democracy is the best form of governance. He justifies this with the fact that the Quran does not advocate democracy at any point, and neither Muhammad nor the four caliphs who followed him introduced a representative democracy (Haqiqatjou 2019: 0:34-0:47). Since, according to the traditionalist Islamic understanding, Muhammad was the ultimate role model for all areas of life, this poses a real problem for Muslims if they were to recognize democracy as the best form of leadership. This is because, ultimately, people have devised a theory independently of God that represents a better form of governance than that which, according to Islamic understanding, was revealed by God himself (2019: 0:58–1:12). For this

reason, Haqiqatjou's criticism of secularism is regularly linked to criticism of the secular democracies associated with it. In one of his articles, for example, he accuses liberals, secularists and atheists:

> "As evidence for the superiority of secularism, they point to the fact that people in secular countries are free to criticize the president, prime minister, or ruling power. Their view seems to be premised on this simple formula: A country has freedom of speech if you can criticize the ruling power in that country." (Haqiqatjou 2022)

In the same article, Haqiqatjou says without inhibition that critics are right when they claim that there is no freedom of speech in Islam. While he is not bothered by this accusation himself, he criticizes the double standards that secularists would display with their criticism. Freedom of speech in secular democracies only exists if it is not used to criticize the country's ruling powers. Where this is done, liberal and secular societies would react with massive censorship and thus act in the same oppressive manner as the colonial powers once did in Muslim countries (2022). Haqiqatjou attributes a "castrating effect" to secularism within democratic processes, as secular people would argue that the beliefs of Muslims, Christians and Jews should not be allowed to influence the government (Haqiqatjou 2016). For him, secularism does not bring people of different values and beliefs together, contrary to what its proponents claim. Rather, it only unites people when they reject their own beliefs for the sake of a common unity:

> Or is secularism just bringing together people who have neutered themselves by cutting themselves off from their convictions and source of identity? What kind of meaningful civic participation can occur when only neutered voices are allowed at the table? (2016)

For Haqiqatjou, the fact that there are lobbyists and interest groups that influence the leaders is a fundamental weakness of democratic structures. This is not related to democratic processes gone wrong, but to a much more fundamental problem that he recognizes in the system of democracy - the question of who or what the laws of a democracy should be based on (Haqiqatjou 2019: 06:35-06:58). He sees no reason to assume that the mass of voters will always act morally, but he takes it as a given that it is easy to manipulate a population (Haqiqatjou 2023:52). Not only does the separation of powers not work in democratically governed countries, but various human rights crimes are committed by Western countries such as

the USA in accordance with all three powers of a democratic society. The history of American history thus disproves the idea that a separation of powers prevents corruption, atrocities and genocides (2019: 05:15-05:50). Haqiqatjou contrasts this with the Islamic model, in which he recognizes an actual separation of powers. Here, unlike in secular democracies, the Sharia provides an objective moral standard, and Islamic legal scholars act as guardians of the law. They would have carried this out disinterestedly and neutrally:

> "The Ulama were very careful not to involve themselves with the Sultan, with the Emir, with the Caliphe because there is this recognition that power can corrupt and that if a scholar is too close to the Sultan, then the Sultan can negatively impact the scholar and corrupt the scholar to make religious rulings that can benefit the Sultan an so this is a very very strong check." (2019: 10:05-10:34)

Citing an oral tradition of Muhammad that is recognized as authentic by internal Islamic standards and Islamic history, Haqiaqatjou argues that there was a certain distance between the rulers and the jurists. This is why, according to Islamic jurisprudence, a system with a genuine separation of powers was established that was free from the corrupting influence of money and power (2019: 12:45-13:07). Al Andalusi's criticism of democracy is also harsh. To defend secularism and democracy, Muslims are sometimes deprived of their basic rights by being banned from wearing Islamic clothing such as the niqab or hijab in public spaces (2013: 35:35 - 35:54). In order to ensure justice, industrial progress, protection of citizens, enlightenment and pluralism, the Muslim world should therefore not try to organize itself according to Western (democratic) principles but should strive to establish a caliphate. Only in this way could the full potential that lies in the Muslim community and the Islamic scriptures be exploited (Al Andalusi 2016: The way forward is a restoration of Islam). Haqiqatjou criticizes the approaches of modern imams, which he considers unsuitable, that propagate an Islam-based separation between politics and religious morality (Haqiqatjou 2022). These principles are un-Islamic and contradict Islam, as politics, jurisprudence and governance are essential parts of Islam. Modern reformers who try to establish a separation between the political and moral laws of Sharia are characterized as secularists who want secularism. In this way, the ultimate goal of Muslims could never be achieved: "a

United Ummah under a khilafa that implements the Sharia." (2022). Haqiqatjou has this goal in mind, and therefore argues in various places for the superiority of Sharia and the advantages of a Sharia-led polity. According to Al Andalusi, Islamic Sharia is one of a number of other value systems that people of different world views and backgrounds have established. Ultimately, however, all value systems, whether it is utilitarianism, natural law theory, Catholic social teaching, social Darwinism or dialectical materialism, have one thing in common: they all have a metaphysical basis. The crucial question is therefore which set of values is safer to apply in a society (Muslim Debate Initiative 2013: 08:11-08:40). In an article published in 2016, he explains how this question can be answered from an Islamic perspective:

> Muslims understand that Islam defines human purpose in the cosmos, and offers a complete and consistent way of life that is designed to lead to human happiness and justice in this life and the hereafter. For Muslims, the author of the Quran, being also the author of mankind, knows humans better than anyone, and understands how humans should be organized and guided - therefore Islamic laws and solutions are perfectly balanced for implementation by mankind.
> (Al Andalusi 2016: Islam needs a restoration not a reformation)

This perfect way of living and structuring a society had such far-reaching consequences in the past that it was even responsible for Europe's technological and economic progress, which was achieved as part of the scientific revolution. It was only through the encounter with the advanced Islamic civilization that curiosity, thought and research were stimulated (2016: Islam needs a restoration, not a reformation). He argues that people of any worldview can act immorally, but that this is not possible for Muslims if they lead a consistent Islamic lifestyle. This is different for secularists, who, unlike Muslims, can be true to their (secularist) convictions and act racist at the same time (2013: 34:00-34:45).

5. In conversation with Charles Taylor

Already in the first pages of his introduction, Taylor makes it clear that he is thinking primarily of the Western world when he speaks of societies that find themselves in a secular age (Taylor 2007:1). This must be taken into account if his theses are to be placed in a debate with Islamic contexts. In determining the relati-

onship between Taylor's theses and the positions of Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi, however, it should be noted that their sphere of influence is primarily within the Muslim community based in the Western world. They are therefore faced with the task of dealing with the social reality in which Muslims living there are placed. In the following, due to the complexity of the work and the scope of Taylor's work, only some of the theses from *A Secular Age will be* selectively brought into conversation with Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi's understanding.

5.1. Immanent frame

Taylor identifies the "immanent framework" in which religious and secular people from Western countries move as one of the central characteristics of the secular age. It is in the nature of such an independent, immanent order "that it can envisaged without reference to God; and very soon the proper blueprint is attributed to Nature." (Taylor 2007:543). According to Taylor, this does not necessarily mean that God is left out of the equation, as he can still be regarded as the author of nature. However, this is only optional, and further perspectives become possible within such a framework, which equates nature with God himself and thus understands it as independent of him. For Haqiqatjou, it is precisely this immanent framework that leads to secularism, inevitably leading to materialistic thinking that disregards inherent values. This creates mental dysfunction in people, as they are designed to recognize meaning in life (Haqiqatjou 2022). Secularism thus not only leads to people not believing in the existence of God but also questioning the value of their own existence (2022). Taylor argues that the individualistic self-understanding of the members of a modern society has led to earlier ideas of a comic order, with which monarchs justified their rule, appearing less plausible (Taylor 2007:541). Through the new understanding of an immanent world, which is opposed to a transcendent one, this understanding gives way to a cosmic order and thus also to a teleologically oriented social reality (: 542). This is precisely where Al Andalusi comes in with his critique of secularism. In a secular worldview, God is no longer thought of as the owner of the world, and thus man is thought of as his own owner. For him, this individualism, which thinks of man as separate from his God-given destiny, arises from what Taylor calls an "immanent framework" (Al

Andalusi 2020: 25:49-26:20). From an Islamic perspective, it is not enough to apologetically counter secularism or invite non-Muslims to Islam to counter it appropriately. It is important that there be a religious revival of the Islamic world in which Allah's commandments are made the highest point of reference in all matters of life and a new awareness is awakened that our human destiny is to serve God alone and to revolve around his will (2020: 29:13-29:47). Haqiqatjou apologetically argues for the existence of an Islamic teleological social order. One of the advantages of the Islamic social order is that not everyone is equal in it. For example, the inequality between men and women, as laid down in the Quran, leads to a situation of order from which society as a whole benefits (Haqiqatjou 2019 16:35-17:00). Secular societies, however, destroy the relationships that give order to the equality of all citizens, which ultimately leads to chaos and confusion. Ultimately, however, this is also just a trick, as there is ultimately only one authority: the secular ruler who governs the country and establishes the laws (17:18-17:55). In his teaching unit on the implications of secularism, Al Andalusi cites utilitarianism as one of the two underlying central ways of thinking in the Western world. He identifies utilitarianism as the way of thinking according to which the maximization of pleasure and enjoyment is seen as the purpose of life. (Al Andalsui 2020 06:47-07:40). Utilitarians, if benevolent, see the role of religion in the fact that it can help people achieve greater well-being through a kind of spiritual hedonism and therefore has a right to exist (2020: 12:46-13:10). Contrary to this assessment, is utilitarianism according to Taylor only one of the side effects of a secular age, but by no means a universally valid philosophy of life for convinced secularists. Thus, he cites counter-reactions to utilitarianism, such as those undertaken by Marx and Rousseau, whose theories operated within an immanent framework but had a higher conception of the highest good than the personal maximization of happiness (Taylor 2007:545).

5.2. Optional faith

Taylor addresses three different meanings of secularity in his work. The third is about the conditions of belief, by which he means a social change that manifests itself in the fact that belief in God is no longer unchallenged but exists as an opti-

on alongside others. Ultimately, this is even an option that often does not appear to be so easy to accept (Taylor 2007:3). Taylor contrasts this with, among other things, the majority of Muslim societies, in which faith, unlike in post-Christian societies, is not only a contested position but one that appears to be much more self-evident (:3). The statements of Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi must be seen in light of this circumstance. Their critical examination of the worldviews that characterize our Western modernity takes place within the framework of a discourse that is generally not conducted in Muslim societies, or not in this way. Why this is often not possible and why belief in God, or Islam, often does not seem optional becomes clear in Islamic positions on apostasy, as defended by Haqiatjou and Al Andalusi. Al Andalusi, for his part, refuses to recognize and use the term "apostasy", preferring instead to describe apostasy from Islam as "sedition and treason" (2015: 16:52-16:58). With this mindset, he backs the logic used by a number of contemporary Islamic countries to call for the death penalty for apostates from Islam with reference to Sharia law (Schirrmacher 2003:104). In the panel discussion in which he referred to apostasy from Islam, Al Andalusi evaded the repeated question of what he thought should happen to ex-Muslims, thus only implicitly passing on his answer. Haqiatjou, on the other hand, makes no secret of the fact that, in his opinion, ex-Muslims should expect the death penalty in a state governed according to Sharia law. The Islamic community is therefore dependent on a common cohesion, which is shown in the sharing of the common religion. Apostasy in Islam is therefore a violent act that affects society as a whole, so the death penalty for apostates ordered by Sharia law is legitimate. (2020 0:42-1:02). It seems obvious that Muslims within societies in which such positions are widespread do not feel any particular inner freedom to question or even publicly renounce their Islamic faith. Although Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi make it clear that the execution of the death penalty must take place within an Islamic state, they advocate precisely such a state. It is clear from this that a society that follows the understanding of Islam that Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi have in mind leaves no room for Taylor's third altered framework of faith. Nevertheless, their target group is nevertheless located within such a society, in which faith appears to be one op-

tion among several. They are therefore faced with the task of making the Islamic faith seem plausible to their Muslim (and non-Muslim) audience without those structural conditions that can penalize apostasy from the Islamic religion.

5.3. The age of authenticity

In his teaching unit on the implications of secularism, Al Andalusi cites the pursuit of self-realization as one of two underlying central mindsets of the Western world. (Al Andalsui 2020 06:47-07:40). This means fulfilling one's potential, being one's authentic self, and expressing oneself in a way that corresponds to the inner self. This assessment corresponds with what Taylor refers to in his book as the "age of authenticity". One of the characteristics of this is an "expressive" individualism that has developed from a lifestyle of elite circles to a mass phenomenon (Taylor 2007:473). Al Andalusi cites the consumer behavior of the masses as a characteristic element of this need for authenticity. These would try to express their individual uniqueness through certain electronic products, clothing and other consumer goods to realize themselves in this way (Al Andalusi 2020: 08:54-09:18). According to Taylor, this criticism falls short. He sees egoistic-hedonistic traits as a motivation for individuals, but shifts this turnaround to something else, namely a change in mindset, which is to be understood as the good itself (Taylor 2007:474). He is convinced that this shift in society requires a double evaluation. It should not be reduced to pure selfishness, pleasure-seeking, or the pursuit of self-realization as consumption. At the same time, the new ideal should not be interpreted exclusively positively, and it should not be assumed that it only brings advantages (:478). What the "expressive revolution" has brought with it in the Western world is a rejection by many of the structures of faith and civilization that are particularly prevalent in Puritan and Evangelical circles (:492). Thus, in the past, there was, for many, an unquestioned connection between personal discipline and the Christian faith. Since the ideal of self-discipline has given way to the free expression of the self, the Christian faith is perceived as unwieldy (:493). Al Andalusi takes up the rise of churches with a charismatic orientation and preaching as an attempt to counteract this unwieldiness with a kind of "spiritual hedonism". Here, preachers take on the role of entertainers rather than spiritual

teachers and try to give people spiritual highs (Al Andalusi 2020:12:46-13:10).

Under no circumstances, however, should this be the Muslim response to the age

of authenticity. He considers it a given that people will have doubts about a religi-

on that orders commandments whose provisions for man are not his individualis-

tic self-realization (2020: 26:26-26:50). The internal Islamic approach to preven-

ting Muslims from having doubts must be much more of a spiritual growing up of

the Islamic world. This should be expressed by making Allah's commandments

the highest point of reference anew and by the individual not taking himself too

seriously (29:13-29:45). Daniel Haqiqatjou's criticism is often directed against the

social consequences of a lifestyle that focuses on the individual:

> Baby boomers are aging alone more than any generation in U.S. history, and
> the resulting loneliness is a looming public health threat. About one in 11
> Americans age 50 and older lacks a spouse, partner or living child. Wow, as
> it turns out, all the progress, all the technology, all the modernization in the
> world can't buy you a loving, committed spouse or a loving, committed
> child. But at least being by yourself means you can do whatever you want,
> whenever you want. And that's what really matters in life: pure, unrestricted
> choice without the baggage of family holding you down (Haqiqatjou 2018).

In his opinion, the loneliness that many people experience in old age is linked to

the way they lived when they were younger. Namely, with a focus on personal

freedom and authentic self-development. In his eyes, this way of thinking and li-

ving, which he describes as "cancer", destroys marriages and family structures

(2018). The solution, he says, is the wisdom of Islam, which provides the social

order that the "degenerated Western world" needs (2018).

6. Historical analysis of their criticism

In their argument, Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi assume that the Sharia represents a

perfect, divine standard. This self-image can be derived from the Qur'an itself,

which speaks of the Muslim community and polity:

> You are the best community ever raised for humanity—you encourage good,
> forbid evil, and believe in Allah.
> Sura 3:110 (translation according to Ali ´Imran)

The Muslim community is therefore seen as the best of all communities, especial-

ly where it follows the commandments of Allah. This means that the Muslim

community is also the best community that has been established for the people.

This basic assumption is the ideological foundation from which Al Andalusi and Haqiqatjou develop their argumentation. While this may certainly be the case for them from their point of view, this judgment is less likely to be shared by the majority of non-Muslims. For example, the Jews and Christians cited by Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi often saw themselves not as profiteers but as victims of Islamic Sharia. In view of this, Christian ethnic groups in the Balkans, Greece and Anatolia repeatedly organized themselves over the centuries against Ottoman rule, under whose subjugation they lived until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Ye`or 2005:209). We can already find instructions from early Islamic legal scholars on how to treat non-Muslims in a recommendable manner. For example, they should be recognizable as non-Muslims through certain clothing, and houses should not be built higher than those of Muslims. Church bells and recitations of their scriptures may not be heard loudly in public. They are not allowed to drink alcohol in public, display their religious symbols, or cry loudly for their dead after a death. Riding pure and mixed-breed horses should also be prohibited (Ye'or 2005:334). These guidelines were not always implemented, and the early Islamic scribe Abu Yusuf scolded a Muslim ruler:

> „In der Tat wurde mir berichtet, daß viele Christen, die dir unterstehen, die Gewohnheit, Urban zu tragen, wiederaufgenommen haben, keine Gürtel um die Taille mehr tragen und ihre Haare wachsen lassen, ohne sie zu schneiden (Ye´or 2005:333)."

> Translation:
> "In fact, I have been told that many Christians under you have resumed the habit of wearing urban, no longer wear belts around their waists, and let their hair grow without cutting it (Ye'or 2005:333)."

Non-Muslims are currently experiencing enormous restrictions on their human rights in countries where Sharia law forms the basis of the constitution. It is part of the self-image of such countries to protect and promote Islam, while members of other religions are tolerated, but their rights are significantly restricted in comparison to the rights of their Muslim fellow citizens (Schirrmacher 2003:106). This concerns dress codes, the practice of religion, the possibility of passing on one's own faith in a missionary capacity, and the right to voluntarily renounce Islam in order to convert to another religion (:106). The latter was (in times of the

Islamic caliphate) and is justified by the fact that apostasy from Islam is to be seen as treason against the Islamic state and would undermine it (: 104). These attitudes are also evident in Al Andalusi and Haqiqatjou, as we saw in 5.2. Thus, while the two may denounce the numerous human rights violations committed by secular democracies, their own understanding of a citizen's fundamental rights is one that many others will find similarly offensive. They may claim that there is an objective moral standard in an Islamic community through Sharia law. However, this standard goes against the understanding of basic human rights as laid down in fundamental texts such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. One of the greatest difficulties with the position of Sharia as an objective moral standard and legislative authority is the fact that there has been no universally recognized Muslim ruler since the reign of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and the four caliphs that followed (632-661). Instead, the Islamic community splintered into several subgroups, some of which had very different views in their understanding of Islamic theology and lifestyle (Schirrmacher 2015:90). Even the sultans of the Ottoman Empire, which remained in power for around 650 years and ruled large parts of the Islamic world, were never recognized by Arab scholars as legitimate rulers of the Islamic world (: 91). From an Islamic point of view, however, the legitimacy of the respective earthly head of the Islamic state plays a decisive role. A Muslim can only be sure that he can lead his life according to the standards of divine law within the Islamic community (Nagel 2001:255-256). It is important to bear this in mind when Haqiqatjou refers to these same Islamic scholars (ulama) as the guardians of Islamic law, which is the objective standard for morality (Haqiqatjou 2023:53). Even among Muslims, there is and has been disagreement throughout history about the correct application of Sharia law and the legitimacy of Islamic rulers. The separation of powers in the Islamic community that he cites also presupposes the integrity of the Islamic religious scholars (Ulema), which, according to him, should have existed throughout history (see 4.2). However, it is precisely this integrity and neutrality that can be justifiably questioned. In theory, it was the task of the caliph and his representatives to implement the Sharia regulations in the way they were understood by the

Ulema. In fact, it was often the case that the Islamic rulers sought to secure the support of the Ulema and their influential followers by granting them high positions and land ownership (Robinson 1988:39). In practice, the Islamic rulers did not allow the jurists to be completely outside their control and the courts to act completely independently (:30). In addition, there was the risk that it would have meant for the Muslim rulers to take away the local traditions and laws of the subjugated and Islamized peoples from now on and replace them with Sharia law. As a result, Sharia law often coexisted and competed with local legal practices. The Ulema therefore had to endeavor to adapt them to Islamic ones, or at least to bring them closer (:30). The authoritative character of Sharia law is not questioned in established Islamic theology, but even here, there are always different views on the correct interpretation and application of Sharia law in individual cases (Schirrmacher 2015:102). Thus, for all the objectivity of Islamic law postulated by Haqiqatjou and traditionalist Muslims in general, it cannot be regarded as a collection of clearly defined laws. It can be interpreted differently to a certain extent, which is reflected in the conflicting views that prevail both between the four Sunni schools of law and within the schools themselves (Nagel 2014:200). In practical matters of life, this repeatedly leads to Muslims following the school of law whose view is most favorable to them on a case-by-case basis (:200). Even in early Islamic history, "the" Sharia never existed in the form of a formal code that could claim to be universally valid (Robinson 1988:30). Nevertheless, despite all the differences in the understanding of how the Sharia is to be interpreted or the legitimacy of the respective Islamic rulers, the theocratic principles of Islam remain intact. The aim is to bring this world closer to the divinely ordained state in all areas until the entire world professes Islam and has the commandments and prohibitions given by Allah himself as its standard (Nagel 2014:160). This stands in stark contrast to biblical statements about the kingdom of God and the ethics demanded by God, as can be seen in the Sermon on the Mount, for example. According to the traditional Christian understanding, this kingdom of God is only visible in the individual followers of Jesus, who should strive to live according to God's will and represent him in this way (:156). From this Christian self-under-

standing of personal discipleship and voluntariness, it follows that it is not the task of state power to guarantee the discipleship of Christ and to legally enforce a biblical ethic. This results in an understanding that within a community, people come together who live with varying degrees of willingness to implement the demands of Christian ethics (:156). In a reflection on the church's self-image, this understanding becomes clear at various points. For example, when the apostle Paul calls on the Christians in Rome to submit to the state authorities and to understand them as servants of God (Romans 13:1-5). He does this in the knowledge that their civil servants are not made up of believing Christians. Even if rulers often justified their claims to power in Christian theological terms (see 5.1), their understanding was nevertheless different from that of a caliphate, as envisioned by Al Andalusi and Haqiqatjou. From Augustine onwards, via Thomas Aquinas and numerous medieval authors, we find the understanding that ecclesiastical authorities could certainly influence matters of secular power. However, a state on this side could never be in a position to be the highest, most perfect form of polity (:156-157).

7. Conclusion

Many of the points of criticism raised by Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi can be understood and underlined from a Christian perspective, at least in some areas. However, in order to avoid uncritical adoption, it is essential to see what differences there are to Islamic views on secularism. At the same time, it is also important to take a closer look at the shared convictions to see whether they are based on a common ideological foundation or whether they appear to be similar on the surface but are based on fundamentally different assumptions. Following on from Bhargava's understanding of what marks the main point of secularism, the question can legitimately be asked: Oppressive, tyrannical, non-egalitarian and exclusionary - to whom? If the aim of secularism is to eliminate these characteristics where a religion brings them with it, then this presupposes a moral value basis on the basis of which it can be measured that these characteristics are a) negative and b) given. Although few to no people will attempt to justify biblically and theologically that oppression, tyranny and exclusion are positive values, there are diffe-

rent ways of looking at what should be considered oppressive, tyrannical or exclu-
sionary in individual cases. Contrary to what Al Andalusi and Haqiqatjou claim,
Jews and Christians, as has been shown, were not satisfied with their circumstan-
ces under Islamic rule. Rather, they actually experienced them as "oppressive,"
"tyrannical," "non-egalitarian," and "marginalizing." The criticism of freedom of
expression restricted by secularists, as practiced by Al Andalusi and Haqiqatjou in
many ways, can be taken seriously and perceived as such. At the same time, it is
important to ask how credible they themselves are as addressees of this criticism
when they openly admit that there is no freedom of speech in Islam either. Alt-
hough they can accuse the advocates of secularism of having double standards
here, in many places they do not even try to cover up the fact that an Islamic
community, as they have it in mind, acts similarly to how they criticize Western
countries. In general, their discussion of secularism and its relationship to Islam
gives the impression of rather one-sided criticism and a less pronounced critical
self-reflection. For example, if Islamic civilization had actually been so advanced
and superior to the Western world due to life under Sharia law and Islamic princi-
ples, how were wester countries able to conquer the Islamic world? The state-
ments on the impossibility of value neutrality address an important issue. Ulti-
mately, every community association must be guided by a certain understanding
of values - including one that is based on secularism. If secularism is to ensure
that all people enjoy their rights and freedoms, it must nevertheless be determined
in advance on the basis of existing values what belongs to these fundamental
rights and what does not. The implementation of secularism can therefore never
take place completely independently of value convictions. Al Andalusi therefore
makes a valid point when he is convinced that it is worldviews such as humanism
that are implemented with reference to secularism. Contemporary Christian philo-
sophers, such as Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig and
others, have also emphasized the importance of a transcendent, metaphysical
foundation as a necessity for objective morality. Nevertheless, like the majority of
Christian thinkers, they come to different conclusions when it comes to the con-
clusions that can be drawn from this for coexistence in a society. From a traditio-

nal biblical-theological perspective, the kingdom of God is being realized "now" and "not yet". As mentioned, this understanding has been evident throughout church history. Within the framework of Christian orthodoxy, no theocratic conviction comparable to that of an Islamic caliphate envisioned by Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi could (fortunately) prevail. Both have a number of points of criticism with which one can certainly agree from a Christian perspective in various areas. These include the critical questioning of utilitarian and individualistic models of life and efforts to bring about a spiritual awakening in one's own faith community. However, the majority of the Muslim target group that Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi are addressing is in a "diaspora situation". Their clash with the Western world takes place not only on a religious but often also on a cultural level. Christians in the Western world generally feel more culturally connected to the secular societies of which they are a part. Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi do not always seem to paint the full picture in their assessments. Especially for an Islamic caliphate with implemented Sharia law, which they see as the ideal polity. A look into the past has shown that the polity they are aiming for has never existed. Contrary to their claims, the Islamic scribes, as the installed guardians of Islamic law, were not a neutral authority. Moreover, only in the early days of Islam, if at all, was there any clarity in the "correct" interpretation of Sharia law. The consistently hostile attitude towards secularism shown by Haqiatjou and Al Andalusi should not be adapted by Christians. Especially since many of the criticized values of secularism, such as equality of all people, religious freedom, etc., overlap with Christian values. Nevertheless, their strong criticism can be helpful in drawing attention to the basic ideological assumptions of secularism that one has unquestioningly adopted. This includes dealing with one's own family and the role that individual self-realization should play in one's own life. It is all too easy for Christians to adopt utilitarian and individualistic models of life instead of evaluating them with sufficient distance on the basis of biblical principles. Due to their self-confident demeanor and apparent knowledge of philosophy and Western cultural history, Haqiqatjou and Al Andalusi will leave a lasting and impressive impression on many of their listeners and readers. However, their expressive and absolute statements should not

obscure the fact that in many places they make assertions that romanticize their own point of view and present secularism in a one-sidedly bad light.

8.Bibliography

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