The Faith and Beliefs of "Nonbelievers"

Edited by

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General Introduction

Tomáš Halík

This volume is a collection of essays written as part of the research project, "The Faith and Beliefs of 'Nonbelievers'," which was carried out by the Czech Christian Academy with the support of the Templeton Foundation. The project was realized between 2020 and 2023 by an interdisciplinary and international team of sociologists, theologians, and philosophers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the Netherlands, under the leadership of Tomáš Halík (project leader), Pavel Hošek (project co-leader), along with Pavol Bargár (project manager), Robert Řehák and Jakub Jirsa (project researchers), Peter Jonkers, András Máté-Tóth, and Jan Jandourek (project researchers and editors).

The project was conducted through a series of international and interdisciplinary working sessions, public events, university courses, case studies, and a lab involving new technologies. Given that regular professional conferences in Prague were canceled during the Covid-19 pandemic, several lectures and discussions were held online. These are preserved on YouTube and accessible on the website of the Czech Christian Academy. As part of this project, Tomáš Halík's book, *Afternoon of Christianity,* was also published in a number of languages.

The Faith and Beliefs of "Nonbelievers" explores the phenomenon of a globally growing segment of people who break with any form of organized religion. Sociologists call these people "nones." This segment has proven to be very diverse and has been understudied and under-reflected upon, especially in post-communist countries that have undergone varying degrees of religious repression.

At the outset of the project, the authors were primarily concerned with the following questions: Who are the nones? What are their faiths and beliefs? Is there a difference between nones in post-communist countries and countries in the West? However, over the course of the project, another theme emerged: In what respects can the experience with nones in the post-communist world contribute to the reconceptualization of key patterns in the sociology of religion?

It appears that the division of people into believers and nonbelievers, theists and atheists, is no longer sufficient to understand the contemporary spiritual scene. A large portion of nones can be described as both *simul fidelis* and *infidelis* – believers and nonbelievers at the same time.

Moreover, only a small portion of nonbelievers can be described as convinced atheists. Some of those who identify as atheists oppose churches and theism but emphasize that although they are nonreligious, they are nevertheless "spiritual." Among these are many ex-Catholics and ex-Protestants who have been disappointed, often scandalized, by the state of their churches.

There are "apatheists" among them who are indifferent to religion because they have never encountered a religion that expresses itself in a language they can understand and trust. Apatheists are also among those who were brought up in a faith in childhood but, having outgrown an infantile form of faith, have not been offered a more mature faith for adulthood.

The purpose of the project was to provide religious and public leaders and opinion-makers with tools to better comprehend the current changes in religiosity and overcome the prejudices between believers and nonbelievers. The essays in this volume are divided into four parts.

The first part, "Ongoing Transformations in the Religious Landscape," consists of three studies by prominent scholars. Philosopher Charles Taylor reflects on his 1996 lecture, *A Catholic Modernity?*. Sociologist of religion José Casanova discusses conditions of belief and nonbelief in our global secular age. Dutch sociologist Staf Hellemans focuses on the contemporary transformation of religion, with an emphasis on the Catholic Church.

The second part is entitled "West-European and American Perspectives on the Beliefs of Nonbelievers." It starts with analyzing the situation in North-Western Europe (mainly the United Kingdom and the Netherlands), then in Austria, and finishes with the situation in the United States. Parallel to this geographical division, there is a disciplinary one. Part 2 begins with a sociological analysis of the situation of nonbelievers in the United Kingdom (Grace Davie), followed by a theological reflection on this matter in the same country (Tony Carroll). The same arrangement is used for the analysis of the Netherlands, first with a sociological (methodological) paper by William Arfman and Anke Liefbroer, and then a philosophical-theological one by Peter Jonkers. The overview of the situation of nonbelievers in the North-Atlantic world is completed by two theological articles from an Austrian perspective (Paul Zulehner and Kurt Appel) and one from an American (Tom Beaudoin).

Authors from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and East Germany (former DDR) contribute to the third part entitled "Central-European Perspectives on the Beliefs of Nonbelievers." Tomáš Halík gives a general overview by, comparing the situation of secularization and nonbelief in Western and Central Europe. This is followed by a few sociological papers on nonbelief in Central Europe in general (András Máté-Tóth *et al*, Jan Jandourek *et al*, and Kinga Povedák *et al*) and in the Czech Republic in particular (David Václavík). Finally, there are some theological reflections based on these sociological findings (András Máté-Tóth, Adéla Muchová, Pavol Bargár, and Eberhard Tiefensee, who discusses the situation in East Germany).

The fourth part, "The Catholic Church after the Pandemic," deals with a specific issue that emerged during the work on the project. It includes papers by Tomáš Halík, Ivana Noble, Jiří Pavlík, and Tomáš Petráček. Amidst the pandemic, believers and nonbelievers were confronted with liminal situations, the fragility of human existence, and the shattering of many certainties.

Surprising reactions to unexpected threats have given new impetus to reflections on the spiritual climate of today's society.

Part I

**Ongoing Transformations in
the Religious Landscape**

A Catholic Modernity 25 Years On[1]

CHARLES TAYLOR

Introduction

First, let me remind myself of what I said in my *Catholic Modernity* piece of 1996,[2] and perhaps add some other considerations which have occurred to me since.

The basic structuring conceit was this: approach the question of whether and how the Gospel message has to be reformulated to be properly heard today, not by looking at Western modernity as the most recent slice of time in Christian civilization, but by imagining it as another culture which has to be evangelized. And my paradigm was the Jesuit mission to China in the 17th century, and the role of Matteo Ricci in it. The initial Catholic response, particularly in the wake of Pius IX and Pius X, tended to be: how can we possibly change? Any alteration of what has been handed down to us must be read as a betrayal of tradition. But the Ricci enterprise called for something different, an act of discernment in the encounter with a new culture: what in this culture can combine with the Gospel message, and what would have to change? Or put differently, what of the outlook we are carrying with us belongs to the Gospel, and what is simply the form it has taken in Europe? In the light of this question, the central truths of Catholicism are not yet completely defined. We will only approach them through a series of such acts of discernment. Not everything we have accepted in the past will be retained, something the initial approach can easily fall into.

Now, this shift in the question had particular relevance for Catholics, because of the peculiarly rigid and top-down conception of authority our church has developed over the centuries in the face of, first, the Reformation and, then, the rise of modern liberal democracy. So one might think that the move I tried to make in the Marianist lecture isn't really pertinent in other faith positions, both Christian and non-Christian. But the wager on which this book is predicated is that nevertheless, something interesting might emerge if people in other positions commented on the move. It seems to me that this bet has paid off, and I will try to explain this in the present essay.

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[1] This paper was originally published in Anthony J. Carroll and Staf Hellemans, eds., *Modernity and Transcendence. A Dialogue with Charles Taylor* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 180-205.

[2] Charles Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?," in *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. James L. Heft (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13-37.

Recent Changes in Religious Life in the West

But first, let me take advantage of the reflections of the past 25 years to fill in some of the details. First, how should one characterize the culture of Western modernity within which our imagined Ricci has to make an act of discernment? Let me try a rapid sketch of this by identifying some of the major changes in the religious life of the West over the last half millennium.[3]

How to characterize religious – or more widely, spiritual – life in the West today? *Glaube als Option*: Faith as an option. This is the description Hans Joas proposes for the contemporary condition of spiritual/religious life in the West.[4] Option here means something different from choice. Issues of faith and non-faith are not settled lightly, like choices of menu. When one enters into or leaves a faith, one feels called. Those who step out and abandon their ancestral religion wouldn't put it this way, but they feel they have no choice in all honesty but to reject faith. Option means something else: it means that for growing numbers of people in the West, or North Atlantic society, as well as some other parts of the world, there is a background understanding to their life of faith/non-faith: they know other people, equally if not more intelligent, or perceptive, who are living another option. The idea that people living within another faith are either weird, or morally deficient, or catastrophically blind, becomes less and less credible. Some of these people will be my friends, others my close kin. This is what it is to see faith as an option. There are hold-outs: among some more conservative Christians, and also among angry atheists, who don't/can't see things this way, but for more and more people this is their understanding of the context in which they live whatever they have put their faith in.

How did this come about? I'd like to mention two large developments, disenchantment and unbundling, each with two facets.

Disenchantment

Disenchantment 1. The first form of disenchantment has arisen over a very long period, centuries in fact. Back in 1500, our ancestors in Europe lived in an enchanted (*verzauberte*) world, one filled with spirits and moral forces, some dangerous (wood spirits), some benign (relics, white magic). Over the last centuries, most of us have ceased to see or, more importantly, to experience the world this way. We are impervious to this dimension of things. We are buffered selves. This is one of the changes (the main one) that Weber calls *Entzauberung*.

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[3] I am drawing here on my book, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[4] Hans Joas, *Glaube als Option: Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums* (Freiburg: Herder, 2012).

Disenchantment 2. The first form of enchantment affected everyone in our civilization. The second was mainly important for the educated minority. It consisted in a notion of the cosmos as expressing and manifesting higher and lower modes of being, for instance, the stars and planets moving ever in perfect circles versus what exists below the moon, which is changing and only partially realizes its form. A cosmos with levels of being was the context in which societies were embedded, and these reflected the levels in the different social orders, clergy as against lay people, rulers and nobility as against commoners. This too has faded, over a rather shorter period.

Now the two terms in the above two paragraphs have occasioned a lot of confusion, and in both cases because they were not sufficiently defined. I have used the word disenchantment here, but there is so much confusion around this term that it needs some commentary. Weber is largely to blame for this. He introduced the term *Entzauberung*, at first for what I'm calling here disenchantment 1. It made sense there because we can see the fading of the world of spirits and forces as a "decline of magic."[5] We could argue that the Western category of magic was largely formed out of the practices that modern reformers, Protestant and Catholic, condemned. But then Weber extended it to cover the decline of religious belief. This was a double mistake. Not only were these two developments distinct, but they are of a quite different kind. Decline of religious faith is connected with (but doesn't simply consist in) the abandonment of certain beliefs (I mean here beliefs *that*, not beliefs *in*). *Entzauberung* in the original sense is not primarily a change in belief, but in lived experience (which ends up producing changes in belief, both belief-that and belief-in). The intellectualist orientation of much discussion of religion today, which reduces everything to issues of belief-that, is responsible for this distortion. And also for the idea that inhabitants of an enchanted world simply suffer from illusion, without taking account of the extent to which we, who live in a disenchanted world, are buffered selves, impervious to certain dimensions of experience.[6]

This confusion around the scope of disenchantment 1 goes along with a continuing fluidity in the connected notion of buffered versus porous selves. I certainly must take much of the blame for this; but the distinction as I introduced it, and as I would like to go on using it, is a narrow one. It concerns not a change in belief, but one in experience, and is meant to capture the fading of a sense of the surrounding world as the locus of spirits and magic forces. A great part of modern Western societies has gone through this change, to the point that many of our contemporaries can no longer even

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[5] See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).

[6] See the brilliant new work by Hans Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2017), who shows up Weber's error (translated as *The Power of the Sacred: An Alternative to the Narrative of Disenchantment* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2021]).

understand this experience. They confuse it with entertaining certain (bizarre) beliefs, and although they can sometimes have a liminal sense of it, as one whistles in passing a graveyard at night, the frisson this arouses can even be pleasant. But our 16th century ancestors would be astounded and uncomprehending to learn that we watch horror movies for *entertainment*. They would ask: what demon possesses us? (Perhaps this a deeper question than we can acknowledge).

But I understand that this explanation is insufficient to clear up all confusion. I have defined buffered selves as people who are incapable of a certain kind of *experience*. But isn't this the way we might describe people who are insensitive to the beauty of nature, or to any feeling of kinship with our natural surroundings, or to other people's feelings, or to a host of other responses to and insight into our cosmos? So the distinction buffered/porous can be played out in all these contexts, some of which allow us to speak of people *moving* from a buffered to a porous stance.

So the distinction calls for a much more fine and subtle discrimination of contexts in which it can figure, with very different import. And I was only peripherally aware of this when I introduced it in *A Secular Age*. I'm not about to take it back, because I don't see what other terms to use to describe the decline of magic that wouldn't give rise to the same confusions. In this, it reminds us of the problems around transcendence, and the confusing multiplication of its possible uses. But more of this below.

The Immanent Frame

These different levels of disenchantment have brought about our present shared understanding of our world. We have different ways of ascribing meaning to this world, and particularly between people of faith or without faith. But our general understanding of the universe we share is the one defined by post-Galilean natural science: a universe governed by impersonal causal laws, which can be understood whether or not we see any human meaning in them. As to our shared understanding of society, it is no longer a reflection of cosmic order, but rather comes about by human action (revolutions, constituent assemblies, seizure of power, or whatever) at dateable moments in history, carried out by identifiable agents. These political structures all claim to be ethically based, and so are meant to embed certain impersonal moral-ethical principles, which have been formulated in our history. The immanent frame is thus an order of natural and human laws, and some ethical principles (human rights, equality), which we all share (or in the case of the principles, claim to share), while differing in the ultimate meaning, transcendent or not, that we see in it. This shared understanding is our social imaginary.

Again, this term may need commentary because it is often taken to refer to a theory, to the effect that the immanent frame is all there is. But here I'm using it to describe a social imaginary, our shared understanding today of the

world of meanings that we hold in common. An analogy to the political dimension might help to illustrate this notion of shared understanding of shared meanings. In a democracy, we need and usually have a shared understanding of the practices essential to it, like for instance, elections and what they determine. But this goes along with an acute sense of how we differ, between Left and Right, pro-European Union and anti-European Union, etc.

Unbundling

The second big pair of changes is more recent, coming to fruition only in the last century or so. I want to speak of unbundlings, referring to two ways in which religious life has in the past linked certain facets of our life together (bundling), which have lately come apart.

Unbundling 1. Many European societies in the last two centuries were confessional societies. The people who belonged to the national church also shared many other forms of belonging: family, parish, and nation. To belong to one was (normally) to belong to all. Belongings were bundled. But in the last decades this interweaving of belongings has come apart. The people I share citizenship with, or my kin, or the neighbors in my village, are not necessarily those who share my faith option.

Unbundling 2. Within churches in our civilization, there was an extraordinary variety of spiritual and other activities: the liturgy, of course, but also the celebration of seasonal feasts; the solemnization of rites de passage, but also special devotions, novenas, pilgrimages, prayers to the Virgin; and then various charitable organizations, and forms of mutual help; and then more private devotions. Different people engaged differentially in these activities, but they were all seen as part of the life of the church, even of the parish.[7] In contemporary society, these activities often split off into separate, dedicated bodies. I may belong to a church, and then also give to *médecins sans frontières*, and then practice some form of meditation, and so on; all in a different context or organization.

Drives. What has driven these unbundlings? In part the greater social, geographic, international mobility of modern life, the loosening of earlier ties that this brings with it, the newer forms of individualism that it fosters. But also that particular form which we refer to as the ethic of authenticity: the idea that each human being has his or her form of being human and ought to find his or her form of life and realize it. We can see a steady loosening of closer ties to bundled communities in 20th century Western society, and a corresponding desire on the part of younger people to step out into the larger society and find their own path. What offsets this process for a while is the large groups of people who are immigrants, and who can only survive by

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[7] See Benoit Lacroix, O.P., *La foi de ma mère. La religion de mon père* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 2002).

holding to their bundled communities. But their children often seek to make their way in the broader society.

There is another facet of modern individualism which may also have contributed to unbundling: the growing reluctance to inflict suffering and sacrifice on people in the name of socially established morality or standards. We can see this, for instance, in the growing trend to abolish the death penalty. Of course, abolition is often motivated on religious grounds. But this same underlying trend may also alienate people from more rigorous forms of morality. The United States was never a highly bundled society in either way, but we can see there too the loosening of ties to the Catholic urban communities which were still very tight in the immediate post-War period.[8] And other societies, like Quebec in one way, and the Netherlands in another, which were highly pillarized, in the recent past have seen a veritable flight from these tighter identities. More and more people want to be more fully part of the bigger society. This together with the ethic of authenticity has helped drive unbundling.

Some Consequences

Disenchantment and unbundling have brought about a different spiritual landscape. We can see, for example, one consequence of both these changes working together in the laicization of life rituals. People will always want to have recourse to *rites de passage* to mark the important stages in human life: birth, marriage, the death of loved ones. But in the 20th century in many Western societies, people came very often to substitute rituals of their own devising for church sacraments. This is most frequent for marriage, and much less in evidence when it comes to funerals. Death is surrounded by mysteries which a quite secularized world has trouble taming. Or sometimes continuing church rituals were given a quite immanent interpretation by many people who took part. This is a phenomenon very much in evidence in Scandinavian societies, where national and ecclesial belonging are still rather bundled. But the meaning of church membership changes. This is the phenomenon Grace Davie calls "belonging without believing."[9]

Balancing this is the phenomenon she calls "believing without belonging," which she sees, among other places, in England. People drop out of active participation in the national church, but yet are happy to see it there, providing on occasion rituals, but also just ensuring the continuing presence

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[8] See Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Lost City; The Forgotten Virtues of Community in America in the Chicago of the 1950s* (New York: Basic Books, 1995) and Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[9] Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

of the faith in society. This tenuous, but still subsistent relation constitutes a kind of "vicarious religion."[10]

This phenomenon means that we sometimes exaggerate the degree of secularization, in the sense of abandonment of religion, in some societies, measuring it simply by the drop in regular attendance at church. In many cases, this distance from the church reflects ambivalence, uncertainty, or even something more positive, rather than abandonment of the faith. Surely, there has been in Western society in general a certain kind of departure from religion (what Marcel Gauchet calls "une sortie de la religion"[11]), by which I mean a departure from official religions which have in the past played a key role in binding societies together. But this has often not been matched by as great a decline in faith. For instance, recent polls in Scotland indicate that 54% consider themselves Christian, but church membership is much less.[12] José Casanova points out the degree to which secularization, defined as the decline of faith, is in Europe an overlay, a kind of generally recognized official story of what is supposed to be happening, rather than an accurate description of things. An amusing side effect of this is that people in some European countries when speaking to pollsters tend to under-report their relation to the church, whereas in America many more claim to go to church than do so. These Americans are trying to conform to their "official story."[13]

And of course, the older official story of sociology, that modernization ineluctably brings secularization, is clearly belied by the American case. It can be argued that this difference is partly accounted for by the fact that unbundling began earlier in America than it did in societies dominated by one national church, common in Europe (and in Quebec). The difference comes not so much from the fact that there is religious competition in the US, as supply-side theorists argue. It is probably due rather to the fact that the impact of the age of authenticity, where seekers try to find their own spiritual path, is different in societies where the religious option is dominated by one official body demanding conformity, than it is in a society where faith has been irremediably plural for two centuries already. In the first context, religion is tainted by its association with power and unearned authority, in the other, it lacks for many this negative connotation. Recent polls in the United States show a surge in the category known as the nones, those who declare non-affiliation to any recognized religious denomination. One cannot, however, deduce from this that these people are not engaged in some form of spiritual search.

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[10] Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe.*

[11] Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

[12] Gordon Brown, *My Scotland, Our Britain* (London: Simon & Shuster, 2014).

[13] José Casanova, "The Religious Situation in Europe," in *Secularization and the World Religions*, eds. Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 206-228.

The End of Christendom

What we see emerging from these and other developments is the decline and eventual dissolution of Christendom.[14] By Christendom, I mean a society and civilization which has been built with the intention of reflecting the Christian faith in all aspects of its life. We emerge from one of the greatest Christendoms, the Latin one. It had its great moments and features, its "grandeurs"; but also its "misères," if I can invoke Pascal. But the Christian faith has often been lived outside of a Christendom; and is today, in Africa, Asia, as well as de facto in Europe.

Its greatness: one thinks immediately of the rich culture of literature, music, painting, architecture, Chartres Cathedral, the Divine Comedy; but also the attempts to tame warrior impulses, to make a more humane society. But inevitably, there are also the dangers, the downsides: the Inquisition, the forced conformity, the abuses of power, the growth of a smug, self-satisfied Christian culture. Mounier and Bonhoeffer were on to something important in their desire to separate the faith from the culture.

But whatever its past highs and lows, Christendom is dissolving. Those who often invoke it most strongly are secular politicians who want good grounds to exclude Muslims and other outsiders.

Our Dilemmas

The two unbundlings, in the context of the disenchantments, produce the world of the immanent frame, in which more and more people are looking for meaning, and a great many of them are looking to reconnect with forms of transcendence. They are, we might say, trying to find a faith which will speak to them. Our church frequently doesn't manage to communicate a faith of this kind to them.

If I might speak autobiographically: I am a teacher and meet a lot of young searchers. I also come from Quebec, a Catholic society which was really brought into existence by the 17th century Catholic Reformation in France. The teaching of St. François de Sales, of Marie de l'Incarnation, the teaching about the love of God: that is, first, love of God for us, which engenders our love of God (1 John 4: 10, 19). I am old enough to have heard echoes of this in earlier Quebec Catholicism. So on one side, there are young people searching; on the other is this rich spiritual deposit; and frustratingly, it seems impossible to join the thirst with the source.

Searchers don't feel welcomed, invited to express what they're looking for. Instead, they hear embattled defenses of dogmas, of moral teachings which often don't connect with their experience, of a magisterium which, in spite of all the difficult dilemmas where honest Christians will almost

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[14] See Emmanuel Mounier's prescient book, *Feu la Chrétienté* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1950).

certainly disagree, claimed (until recently) to speak with one voice. This itself was enough to undermine the charisma of heartfelt conviction which is central for the teaching of Christian faith.

Now this defensive stance meets an echo among many of the faithful today. These people feel that the essentials of the Christian faith are being whittled away, that crucial church teachings, about the importance of chastity, the avoidance of extra-marital sexual activity, of artificial birth control, of the so-called disorder of homosexuality, are being abandoned. Religious conservatives generally in our age are especially concerned about authority, loyalty and sanctity, which they see as threatened by contemporary cultural changes.[15] These people tend to accentuate the positive side of Christendom. They see it as having been the basis of an order, social and moral which is indispensable for human beings. Christendom saw the most complete bundling, where a faith, a social order, a morality, and a civilization, were all tightly associated. Every step out of it seems to many to be a step downward. And, of course, they have sometimes been right. The step out of Christendom represented by Fascism and Nazism was a step into darkness, nihilism, a glorification of evil.

One might argue (certainly I would) that all the new departures in modernity are not destructive in the way Fascism was. But many people do see a whole range of changes typical of late modernity – in favor of greater individual freedom, greater equality (especially between the sexes), and greater inclusion (e.g., gay marriage) – as an attempt to flout basic constants in human nature. They see the moral standards of traditional Christian civilization as essential to a proper human life. The Church is thus right to uphold these against a self-destructive society which in the end will have to return to them.

Alongside Catholics of this persuasion, there are those who regret the loss of a sense of the sacred, who want to return to earlier forms of liturgy, stress the importance of a clergy set apart, make clear the high standards expected of a Christian, even if this means a less inclusive Church.[16]

Regret, even anguish at the passing of Christendom used to take the form of attempts to reconvert those who have fallen away. But now it more often brings about a defensive withdrawal from contemporary society and culture, in what is often called the Benedict Option. The reference is to the founder of the Benedictine order in the sixth century, whose monastic order kept alive many of the traditions of the early church which couldn't be sustained elsewhere through what we now call the Dark Ages.

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[15] See Edward Vacek, S.J., "Evolution of Catholic Marriage Morality in the 20th Century," *Intechopen* (2020): 2-3, http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.95101 (accessed January 18, 2021); Vacek quotes Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon, 2012), 182-183.

[16] I have benefitted from the book of Yann Raison du Cleuziou, *Qui sont les Cathos aujourd'hui?* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2014).

Dilemma: How can we make room for the searchers of our age, and then all live together in communion, those who want renovation, and those who want above all to resist it? I wish I had the answer to this question.

Of course, this issue has to be thought out on the level of the global church, whereas my tracing of developments in the last centuries has been mainly directed to our predicament in the West. But this is hard enough, and I will try to envisage the problem here within this narrower frame. In our situation the issues are often defused by people gravitating towards affinity parishes. They can thus more or less easily avoid meeting each other and confronting their differences.

But this apartheid would no longer be possible if lay people had more of a say in the life of their diocese. Then people from different outlooks would have to meet and deliberate together. And indeed, there are other reasons why such a greater role for the laity would be beneficial – not least to deal with the ravages of pedophilia.

But however we manage it, the goal would be to start a discussion in which the outlook which emerges for seekers from our present situation could exchange on a very deep level, in patience and as part of an effort to achieve mutual understanding, with that of the conservers. We need perhaps to disengage from the immediate hot issues which divide us, and which journalists love to see us arguing about, and look at the deeper frameworks that we operate out of.

How Does the Kingdom of God Build in and Beyond History?

It might help to get at the deeper issues, to raise some more foundational questions. Here I want to look at the question: how does the Kingdom of God build in history, and eventually beyond?

The Christendom perspective tends to a certain take on this. Building the Kingdom passes through building Christendom. The Kingdom is further extended when Christendom extends, through missionary activity, bringing new peoples, societies, civilizations, and Christianizing them. Christendom expands.

There has even been a tendency in Western Christendom – perhaps more in Protestant than in Catholic societies – to slide towards some quasi-fusion with the post-Enlightenment progress story. Christian societies become enlightened, democratic, rights-affirming, and this whole package spreads. This was a widely held view at the turn of the 20th century, but it also lingers on today.

But for people coming out of the present predicament of the immanent frame and the search for meaning, this historic order doesn't have the same meaning. How to recover contact with the Gospel today? For most of us (I speak for myself again), we went through some period of break with the faith we were brought up in (if we were brought up Christian at all), before returning through a different route. We are "believing again," rather than "believing

still."[17] We are very aware of the fragility of historical constructions supposed to resolve the problems of humankind once and for all, supposed to resist the forces of decay and loss of direction, whether these be communist or liberal, or whatever. Many younger people today don't feel that they live in a Christendom, and to the extent that this is invoked by churches as a past model, its negative features tend to be salient, especially the demand for conformity which pre-empts the readiness to listen.

In the wreckage, how to hear the Gospel again? The image of the Kingdom which has power for us is that of the mustard seed (Matthew), the tiny seed which grows hidden from sight into a great tree. The mustard seeds are the points at which acts happen which break the ordinary course of things and show the love of God, like the conversion of St Francis, or the work of Jean Vanier, or the courage of non-violent resistance which brings not just liberation but peace with the former oppressors. The stance of faith behind this intuition is that these acts sustain and inspire each other across history, even when we don't know about them, but all the more when we do. The Kingdom is not built so much in lasting structures as in the network of these seeds, which radiate power to other potential seeds.

This doesn't mean that we start from scratch, ignoring the history of the church. On the contrary. But that history is rich for us because of these points of breakthrough, each of which works for us and for the Kingdom, even if unknown, but all the more powerfully if we do know about it.[18]

The background understanding here is that our horizontal, irrevocably pluralist society, where we live together in the immanent frame, amounts to a new human predicament, one in which the church must find a different voice, analogous to its acculturation in non-European civilizations. But that doesn't mean that the Christendom past is irrelevant. Its saints and their acts form part of the network that sustains us. Through this network we connect to all ages and all loci of Christian life.

Even what seems like failure in the Christendom perspective counts here. Entire Christian churches have been wiped out in history. The rich history of Syrian Christianity was to a large extent absorbed into Islam, and the remnant in the Middle East is in danger of being forced out.

So the history of our Christendom is important to us not because we want to continue its structures, or repeat all its solutions to our ethical problems, but rather because it is a rich field of seeds which are still working in us, and the more so the more we are familiar with it.

And besides we can't really continue its structures, because we are more and more in the predicament of our fellow Christians in Asia and Africa: we

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[17] W.H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1973).

[18] We are touching here on one of the key terms invoked in Vatican II, "resourcement," the return to sources. This was a key move to the whole manner of operating of the Council. See John O'Malley, *When Bishops Meet: An Essay Com-paring Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

share (in our case) a society of the immanent frame with people of all religions and none. We live side by side with an immense variety of others and will more and more do so with time. All the above is an attempt to articulate some of the sense of background out of which seekers today emerge in our society. I throw it out in the hope that we can find a way to talk about our differences at this level of depth, and come to some better understanding of each other, across our divisions.

Modes of Spirituality Among Seekers

Let's look at the modes of spirituality which emerge among seekers who are approaching or embracing Christian faith. This is new in some ways, but it also recuperates facets of our historical faith which have been relatively neglected:

(a) Instead of mounting on the battlements to defend the whole existing package (Pio Nono), we can step out with confidence to plant more seeds (Francis).

(b) The new mode recuperates the notion that faith is a journey (Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine), not a point of arrival from which we have to keep from being displaced – as if we already knew what it is to be a Christian and just have to stick to it.

(c) It therefore recovers the value of doubt. Doubt is the motor which makes us continue the journey. The journey always involves some trouble and darkness, but it can take the form of doubt, and frequently does in our time. Faith as a journey involves a different notion of what it is to move ahead in a Christian life. For some, this might mean becoming more able to meet moral demands which are already clearly defined at the outset. But understood as a journey, faith can encounter breaks, impasses, which one can only surmount as new understanding dawns.

(d) Ecumenism of friendship. The mustard seeds sometimes fall outside the Christian church (Malala Yousafzai). And seekers can recognize each other and share. This can intensify one of the great achievements of the contemporary world: the ecumenism of friendship. This goes beyond the agreement not to attack or denigrate each other, but is the expression of a real desire to understand the other, and can lead to friendship and solidarity across the differences. Such exchanges can often include atheists. We can often learn from such exchanges (e.g., John Main who learned meditation from a Hindu guru in Malaya, and then rediscovered a similar practice in John Cassian). But the main fruits lie in the deeper understanding and respect.

Highlighting spirituality has nothing to do with attempts to show an underlying identity between all religions. This latter kind of enterprise usually focusses on beliefs-that and tries to find the highest common factor. But religions are not defined simply by propositional beliefs; they involve prac-

tices which enable us to come closer to God (or Nirvana, or whatever ultimate reality is posited). Christianity has some similarity to Buddhism, but its practices (prayer, liturgy, meditation, works of charity) only make the sense they do as responses to the kenotic love of God. This is not of incidental importance.

For all the common biblical-theological ground between the three great Abrahamic faiths, and even though they may all have some concept of God dwelling among us, the Christian specificity, which can be defined in the doctrine of the Incarnation-Crucifixion-Resurrection, makes a huge difference. And this is not just a matter of some background theoretical explanation which can be ignored in practice, because the heart of Christian practice aims to prolong, expand, and intensify this mode of presence.

And while we are bringing up differences, we should note that within this Christian specificity, there is a specific Catholic form, in which the sacraments, and in particular the Eucharist, have a central role. (It should go without saying that this Catholic specificity is practiced not just by those in communion with Rome, but also by, e.g., Anglicans, Eastern Orthodox and others.)

It is obvious that asking the Ricci question is likely to lead to greater openness towards searchers, whereas seeing modernity as the present time-slice in Christian civilization can encourage the sense of loss and regression which calls on us to resist decline. Seeing our present through the Ricci lens yields something different than looking at it through the Christendom lens. That was my reason for introducing the former in my original lecture.

But the Ricci lens also offers a different perspective from that of a certain Enlightenment liberal progress story, which sees science and the rationality of which science is the paradigm expression bringing about inevitable progress towards a more free and humane society. And in my Marianist lecture, I gestured rapidly towards certain dangers in contemporary humanitarian, liberal, socialist thought, with many of whose goals I am in agreement. But the deviations still threaten. There is always the temptation to take full control, carried to extremes in Bolshevism. From this standpoint, weak and imperfect human beings, originally seen as potential partners in solidarity, can come to be objects of contempt. Dostoevsky's work is rich in warnings about this.

Then there is the danger that reform can issue in rules; indeed, a lot of reforms would be impossible without these. But the danger lies in a fetishization of rules which occludes our perception of human beings in their unrepeatable particularity (Ivan Illich makes this point very convincingly). These and other dangers can't invalidate the cause of political reform, but they have to be guarded against, and reading the Gospels makes this clear. But that is far from saying that reading the Gospels automatically shields one against these; or that only people who have read the Gospel in this way are aware of this, sometimes crying, problem.

The Need for Historical Learning

But if the Ricci lens is crucial here, it is not enough. And I would like to develop my position beyond what I said in the original lecture.

Just validating different cultures as matrices in which the Christian faith expresses itself differently ducks the question whether certain expressions have been, or are, indefensible. This is what some of those who regret the passing of Christendom would say about contemporary normative developments, like the assertion of gay rights, or gender equality. And it is something we would probably all say today about the Crusades, or the acceptance of slavery: however understandable they were at the time, there is no question of our reverting to them.

So the Ricci lens, which might on its own put all Christian cultures on an equal footing, has to be complemented with a lens of historical learning, through which we recognize that certain historic practices, tolerated in earlier times, are simply and absolutely unacceptable. Does this mean that we are back in a liberal Enlightenment progress theory? Well, no; but the differences are complex here.

In fact, the history of religion shows progress, or what we might call a growth in moral insight. Take the period which Jaspers called "the Axial Age."[19] The thesis is that there were a number of breakthroughs in spiritual/moral outlook about the same time in human history, but in many different places, and in different terms, but with a certain affinity between them. This is one we would normally be tempted to explain by diffusion, influence from one to another. But they happened too close to the same period, and too far apart in geographic-cultural terms, for an explanation through diffusion to be plausible. They are also interestingly different, even though there are affinities.

The four usually mentioned, moving from West to East are: Socrates/Plato breakthrough in ethics; Hebrew prophesy; Upanishadic and Buddhist thought in North India, and Confucianism in China.[20]

Any view about the long-term history of religion turns on an interpretation of the Axial age. What was the nature of the Axial revolution? This is sometimes spoken of as the coming to be of a new tension "between the transcendental and mundane orders," involving a new conception of the "transcendental."[21] But transcendental has more than one meaning. It can designate something like a going beyond the human world, or the cosmos (1). But it also can mean the discovery or invention of a new standpoint from which the existing order of cosmos or society can be criticized or denounced

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[19] Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1949).

[20] Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[21] Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 1.

(2). Moreover, these two meanings can be linked. The place or being beyond the cosmos may yield the new locus from which critique becomes possible. The Hebrew prophets condemning the practices of Israel in the name of God come to mind.

Again, potentially linked to these two is another change: the introduction of second-order thinking (3), in which the formulae we use to describe or operate in the world themselves come under critical examination.

Possibly linked with these three is another change: the implied universalism which Jan Assmann has noted (4).[22] The notion here is that the transcendent being, or the principles of criticism, may be seen as of relevance not just to our society, but to the whole of humanity.

But the link with our own society may be weakened in another way. Any of the above changes may bring with them a new notion of the philosophical or religious vocation of individuals. Indeed, the changes may themselves be introduced by such individuals who invent or discover new forms of religious or philosophical life. The Buddha or Socrates come to mind. This can be the original point of a process of disembedding (5), a process I would like to deal with in the following discussion.

These five may be seen as rival accounts of what Axiality consists in, but it might be better to see them as potentially linked changes; in which case, the issue between them would be more like this: which of these changes provides the best starting point from which to understand the linkages in the whole set?

Without wanting to challenge any of these readings, I would like to suggest a sixth way of conceiving the change. It was a shift from a mode of religious life which involved feeding the gods, and where the understanding of human good was that of prospering or flourishing (as this was understood); and where the gods or spirits were not necessarily unambiguously on the side of human good; to a mode in which a) there is notion of a higher, more complete human good, a notion of complete virtue, or even of a salvation beyond human flourishing (Buddha); while at the same time b) the higher powers on this view are unambiguously on the side of human good. What may survive is a notion of Satan or Mara, spirits which are not ambivalent, but rather totally against human good. I make some of the links clear from the outset, because I would like to present this change in our understanding of the good (6) as a facet of the change I call disembedding (5).

Why speak of breakthrough? Because the religious/philosophical outlook of (at least) elites broke with the patterns of religious life which existed before, introducing:

(a) a new notion of the highest good, beyond ordinary human flourishing – a prosperous, full life with many descendants, safe from the ravages of

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[22] Jan Assmann, "Cultural Memory and the Myth of the Axial Age," in *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, eds. Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 370-378.

famine, drought, flood, natural disaster, penury, want, etc. – which the sacrifice or dedication to spirits and gods was meant to secure;

(b) this good was thought to be that of human beings universally, rather than that of our particular society or community;

(c) the good could extend beyond the cosmos (God of the Hebrews, Nirvana).

Three things seem to be true of these breakthroughs, which are puzzling: (1) they have affinities, but they are not by any means identical; (2) they seem to be irresistible, in that they come to be adopted, in one or other form, everywhere, with changes and transformations; some of these forms eventually bring about universally accepted standards, like the Universal Declaration of 1948; at the same time, (3) their universal acceptance goes along with almost universal failure to live up to them.

The close to universal acceptance of rights, however, makes a difference, but it can be a negative one: for instance, when people want to discriminate today against immigrants, minorities, etc., they have to argue universalistically that the target population is bad, e.g., Muslims are dangerous because they threaten *laïcité* (France and Québec) or even that they are terrorists. In earlier societies, our gods could call on us to attack and wipe out another people. Now we need some special reason: they are heathens, heretics, polluters of the earth, etc.

Another important spin-off of the Axial changes is the power and potential violence of scapegoating in our societies. In earlier religions, there were gods and spirits related to different facets of human life, peace, war, sexuality, etc.; and, among them, gods requiring human sacrifice. The Axial shift gives us a world in which scapegoating plays an important but hidden role. The fact that it is hidden allows scapegoating to blind-side us again and again. Remarkable, well-known incident: In the first convention issuing from the 1789 Revolution, Robespierre voted against the death penalty. And yet, later, he launched the Terror talking of corruption and its cleansing from the French state. If you had tried to show him how similar all this was to religious scapegoating, he would no doubt have said that that kind of thing belongs to fanaticism (e.g., Catholicism) and has been relegated forever in our enlightened age. And this blind-siding is happening today, as rational, secular people turn against Muslims, and get caught up in Islamophobia because they threaten Enlightened, secular society. René Girard has an undoubted point here. As he also does in the theological suggestion that the Incarnation and Crucifixion had the transformative power that it does because Christ enters into this most corrupted, perverted deviation of human life, and reverses it from within.

What all this reflection on the Axial revolutions strongly suggests theologically is: that (1) humans are being led, educated, brought to some higher outlook by some (?) agency. But the uptake of this is highly partial, and by most people most of the time, somewhat distorted, while even in their partial forms, the outlooks are hard to live up to. And (2), it seems to suggest not only an Irenaeus-type education of humanity, but also something like a world

human milieu, through which the spiritual outlook of humans in one civilization affects that of others, even beyond traceable influences of diffusion.

Another theological reflection: Recurring to what I called above the Christian specificity, we can envisage this human milieu as transformed by the Incarnation. Seen in this light, the communication through this human milieu is changed and intensified through the working of the communion of saints (But this unfortunately is not the whole story; evil is also being communicated through this milieu). So that my spiritual life is not only being inspired and empowered by the saints I have read about and pondered over, but also by others I have never heard and may never hear of.

The Demands of the Gospel

Moreover, this kind of forward step can't be just confined to the Axial Age. I mentioned above the perplexing and frustrating fact that the Axial changes raised our moral aspirations, but that we seem to remain stubbornly unable to live up to them. But we may argue that this inability has changed over time. True, slavery was for centuries unchallenged by the Christian churches, but in the late 18th century, a movement starts which ends up abolishing it (at least, as a legal status; the stubborn inability to eradicate the fact remains, alas, with us).

This and other changes of the last two to three centuries (like for instance, the rise of democracy, greater political demands for equality, the entrenching of human rights) bespeak some kind of rise in moral consciousness. These are usually attributed to the Enlightenment, which is somehow often thought of as distinct from, even opposed to religion. But, in fact, the powerful movements to abolish slavery, both in England and the United States, were led by Evangelicals.

But the whole issue of Christian backsliding, and failure to live up to the demands of the Gospel – or indeed, of the human inability in general to live up to our best moral aspirations – has to be considered from another angle. If we define the demands of the Gospel by the actions of Christ in the New Testament, then it can be argued that integrally following them by whole societies has never been possible. So defined, the demands of the Gospel entail pacifism, turning the other cheek to those who attack us. On the level of whole societies, this would mean doing away altogether with armed forces. But this would (in most cases) ineluctably lead to foreign conquest, and the inclusion of the pacific society in the tax base of a larger armed power (the exception would be a small, weak society, like Monaco, whose integrity was assured by a larger armed power). David Martin has offered a penetrating account of this phenomenon, arguing that Axial religions run all in some respects against the grain of the world, but at different, more or less acute

angles of transcendence, as measured by the radicality of the demands they make.[23]

This means that there has always been some fudging in Christendom, some (often shame-faced, but also sometimes brazen) allowance of the ultimately unacceptable, like slavery, warfare, capital punishment, along with a statement of its provisional nature this side of the Parousia. Alongside war and division, there is the liturgical enactment of universal reconciliation. And this other dimension has been expressed, for example in restrictions on the clergy, who have not been allowed to take part in acts of war. All this has made unavoidable delicate and often embarrassing balancing acts in Christian societies. And this has to be kept in mind when we condemn our ancestors for, e.g., going on Crusade.

But this is not all. For any given compromise of this kind, the question can arise: is it really necessary? Could we somehow make a fuller expression of the demands of the Gospel possible? This has been a recurring issue in the last few centuries, where the realization of age-old Axial values has come onto the agenda. Sometimes we can surprise ourselves by what can be done. Across-the-board pacifism seems impossible, but there is Gandhian non-violent resistance, an innovation which has been taken up in many other contexts, like Martin Luther King's civil rights movements, the velvet revolutions which put an end to communism, the revolt which toppled Marcos in the Philippines. After tyranny, there must be justice, but there can also be Truth and Reconciliation, as in South Africa.

The gains of these new types of action are not only the immediate ones of avoiding bloodshed, important as these are. It is often also the case, that the protagonists in these revolutionary conflicts can more easily live together afterwards in peace and (some degree of) reconciliation.

So it is incumbent on us, not only to hold back on some of the demands of the Gospel, but also to examine always afresh whether we can't successfully push the envelope, and find a way to realize them more fully. The fact that this may be possible in one place doesn't show that it will succeed elsewhere. It has often been repeated that Gandhian methods wouldn't have worked against Nazism. But that doesn't dispense us from trying where a chance seems to offer itself to extend the area of compliance with these demands. This is an important part of what people have defined as reading the signs of the times.

So what we read through the Ricci lens has to be in turn scrutinized through that of the demands of the Gospel; and that in turn through that of worldly wisdom, to discern what is possible. But this third lens has to return again and again to the world of conflict and mutual enmity to discern the rare moments where novel forms of political action can realize more fully the Gospel demands. There is a concatenation of lenses here; three, or perhaps four, depending on how you count. Together they form what we could call a

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[23] David Martin, *Ruin and Restoration: On Violence, Liturgy and Reconciliation* (London: Routledge, 2016).

template for judging how to proceed when the world we have learned to live in, changes.

How to Live the Life of a Catholic in Contemporary Society?

Where does this leave us who share this contemporary predicament, where officially high standards of conduct, shared between self-declared followers of the atheist Enlightenment and proponents of many religious and spiritual traditions, nevertheless fail regularly to be implemented, and often are violated in the most dramatic fashion? One response among secularists is to declare these goals illusory and blame the remnants of religious outlooks for our ungrounded belief in them (e.g., John Gray). Among many people of faith, the failure is placed at the door of nonbelievers and their imperviousness to the will of God.

But some, from every conceivable outlook, want to persevere, to go on trying. Often because they have a sense of a power which can transform this imperfect humanity. For people of faith, the sense is that the power comes from outside us, beyond us; it is not innate to humans. This is one facet of what we gesture at with the term transcendence. The other facet can follow from the first: if we think of this transformation as not simply wrought on future humans, but as affecting all who have lived and will live, then we can't see death as simply the end of life. So human life on its way to transformation has to transcend death, in some way which we barely understand.

Different faiths have different ways of conceiving of this power. For the Christian, it is self-emptying (kenotic) love, which can transform its object.

This discussion has brought us to a point where we can return to the original question posed by the Catholic Modernity lecture back in the 1990s and develop it (just a little) further. The issue was, seen in the Riccian perspective, how to live the life of a Catholic in contemporary society, what to accept, even applaud, what to condemn, or at least modify or complement.

As is evident from the discussion in 1996 and here, I believe there is much to applaud in the development of rights-based, democratic societies, respective of authentic expressions of personal and cultural difference, concerned to reconcile differences and to avoid violence. In this sense, I feel myself at one with what is often described as the ethic of the Enlightenment.

Only […] There are two big areas where I can't concur. The first is often conveyed in the term Enlightenment: that the insights spring from Reason alone. Or to put it differently, the model of reason invoked here is much too narrow. The narrow model sees the injunctions of reason as (to put it very curtly): accepting the deliverances of science and avoiding contradiction. For many followers of Kant today (e.g., Rawls, Korsgaard, Habermas), the recognition of universal rights – that what I want for myself, I must will for everyone – is self-evidently the only way to avoid contradiction.

For me, reason has an indispensable role, but this is a hermeneutic reason, whose main goal is not to avoid contradiction, but to offer the best and

most comprehensive interpretation of very deep human intuitions, which in my view are the fruit of an Irenaeus-style pedagogy of God. I may be wrong about their origin, but I do not see how we can get behind them to anything more fundamental. Making sense of them can involve avoiding contradiction but requires much more. It requires making sense of their sources (in the sense I tried to define in *Sources of the Self*), of what kinds of development can foster the goals they set for us, and a host of other considerations.

The other big area of dissent from the standard Enlightenment view questions whether this is sufficient. There is not just the question of the means we use to realize it, although there are extremely important illusions which have arisen among those who invoke this ethic: the example of Bolshevism offers an extreme case where the best ends, combined with a shallow understanding of human motivations, and how they can further or impede the good, can wreak the most terrible horrors, even unmatched in the bad societies we are trying to replace. Here is a place of negative dissent. But there are also places where the Enlightenment ethic at its best needs to be complemented. The rules it prescribes are generally good, but we need more. This is partly a matter of what I discussed in the previous section about the grain of the world in relation to the demands of the Gospel. It is important negatively not to press the demands on society to the point where they will wreak havoc and oppression, as we saw in the Bolshevik case. But we may also, like Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mandela, discern positively those situations where we can move ahead and meet these demands more fully.

But there are other demands of the Gospel, which are not relevant to this kind of issue, which are not primarily about what we do, or the society we create, but about what we are, what we see, what we respond to. There are ends in society, like educating our children and healing the sick, which can best be carried out in institutions, and institutions require rules. But sometimes the rules need to be applied with discernment, with a vivid sense of what the recipients (e.g., students, patients) are, feel, aspire to as individuals. By definition this need cannot be met by further rules. This call also comes out of the Gospel, not as a prescription which is obviously there, such as forgiveness or turning the other cheek, but in the extraordinary way of being of the Gospel's central figure, his ability really to *see* people (the Samaritan women, Zacchaeus) in all their individuality, frailty and strength; through the prism of compassion (something the Gospel situates in the gut).

So the Christian supports and tries to live some version of the Enlightenment ethic, but in the different register of kenotic compassion. And this leads to important differences, both in assent and dissent. And these differences may just plant the mustard seeds whose growth may transform the world for the better, more than the best ethic of rules could ever do. This I take to be a tenet of Christian faith, not an apodictic certainty.

Conclusion: The Ecumenism of Friendship

Now that something analogous is true of other faiths and philosophies and moral outlooks in the modern world seems to me very likely, I would even say, evident. And exploring this is what this book is all about. I would like to end this essay with some account of how the Catholic modern in the above sense might stand both to the ecumenical community of seekers in different traditions old and less old, and to the Church. In both cases, the issue is healing splits, divisions, distances which undermine solidarity and breed distrust.

The ecumenism of friendship involves on the one hand solidarity in fighting discrimination, and in winning people away from those who want to target some religion or philosophical position as a threat to us (our faith, our civilization). As I argued above, only ecumenical-minded Christians and Muslims together can fend off the war of religion that zealots on both sides are eager to start. But this ecumenism is also important in itself. The recognition that the goal of building a world in which peace, friendship, mutual exchange can flourish is one which we share can heal another kind of age-old rift, not one of hostility as such, but rather a rift of distance, wariness, mutual estrangement and distrust.

And then in relation to our fellow Catholics, we have an important task of reconciliation between seekers and conservers. In this, we still have a long way to go. Unlike many, I think that the drift towards affinity parishes is a positive step, but we need a milieu in which people from these different communities can meet and work together. Here the lack of bottom-up decision-making in the (Roman) Catholic Church represents a great handicap.

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Conditions of Belief and Nonbelief in Our Global Secular Age

José Casanova

The formation of a global world system of religions (in the plural) is as intrinsic to processes of globalization as the formation of a single world capitalist system and the formation of a global world system of nation-states.

But these three dynamics of globalization – the economic, the political, and the cultural-religious – are distinctly different. The world capitalist system is a single global economy with its own internal division of labor between capital and labor, between centers and peripheries, firms, markets, etc. It is a single internally constituted and differentiated system.

The world system of nation-states, by contrast, is a system of plural, yet isomorphic units. It is constituted by the formation of a plurality of nation-states, all assuming a similar form. The system became globalized through the expansion of the European Westphalian system of territorial nation-states to the entire globe through Western colonialism and anti-Western anti-colonial independence movements.

The global world system of religions is not only plural, but pluralist. Each religion is and claims to be unique and different, yet equal to the others. It is, therefore, a system based on the principle of equal pluralist diversity. The global world system of religions has been formed through a dual process of differentiation: a) through the modern differentiation of religion from non-religion, that is, from the secular, and b) through the differentiation of each and all religions from each other.

Thus, when analyzing global religious dynamics, one needs to pay attention to both interrelated differentiations, namely, to the relations between the religious and the secular throughout the world, that is, how the boundaries between the religious and the secular are constituted, *and* to the relations of all religions with one another, through a process of mutual recognition.[1]

The Internal Road of European Confessionalization and De-Confessionalization: Secularization without Religious Pluralism

The secularization of Western European societies, understood here simply as the drastic and progressive decline in religious beliefs and practices among the European population, is a social fact that is not in question. What is questionable is the theoretical explanation of European secularization as the necessary result of processes of modernization. In fact, in the last decades

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[1] Throughout this paper I have drawn freely on José Casanova, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics: The Modern System of Classification* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

it has become increasingly evident that modernization in many parts of the world has not been accompanied by noticeable religious decline, but rather by different kinds of religious revitalization and most significantly by the proliferation of religious pluralism. Therefore, one needs to put into question the assumption that modernization necessarily leads to secularization.

Here, we need to examine two different questions. Firstly, if modernization per se cannot serve as a blanket explanation for the unquestionable secularization of European societies, what could serve as a more parsimonious and concrete explanation of European secularization from a global comparative historical perspective? Relatedly, and this would be the second question, given that modernization and secularization in Europe were not accompanied by dynamics of religious pluralization, how can one account for the fact that modernization in much of the rest of the world is accompanied by religious pluralization with limited secularization?

To answer both questions, I am going to build upon Peter Berger's last formulation of his own revisionist theory of secular modernity. In his book *The Many Altars of Modernity,* Berger proposed to change the focus of analysis from secularization to pluralism.[2] He argued that modernity does not produce necessarily secularization. What it does produce inevitably is pluralism, specifically two diverse kinds of pluralism, namely religious pluralism and secular-religious pluralism. My own succinct response to Berger is that European modernity produced secularization without religious pluralization, while modernity in much of the rest of the world produced religious pluralization without much secularization.

In Berger's own words, "the new paradigm should be able to deal with two pluralisms – the co-existence of different religions and the co-existence of religious and secular discourses."[3] We need to account, first of all, for religious pluralism, that is, for the emergence of a global system of religions which I call global denominationalism. But we also need to account, additionally, for secular-religious pluralism, that is, for the emergence of differentiated but co-existing religious and secular spheres, both in the social space and in the minds of individuals.

Berger's new paradigm, however, is still embedded within a theory of Western modernization that views modernity itself as the carrier or catalyst of both types of pluralism: multi-religious pluralism and secular-religious pluralism. Countering Berger, I would argue that European modernity is certainly the carrier or catalyst of the second type of modern pluralism, the secular-religious one, but not of the first one, multi-religious pluralism. As the exceptional process of European secularization amply demonstrates, European modernity per se does not contribute to religious pluralism. We need an additional factor or analytical framework to understand the emergence of a global system of religious pluralism, and this in my view has to be a theory

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[2] Peter Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity. Towards a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2014).

[3] Berger, *The Many Altars*, ix

of globalization, a globalization that both precedes Western secular modernity and continues in an accelerated and transformed manner after Western secular modernity.

Global religious pluralization emerged before Western secular modernity in the early modern era of global interreligious encounters that accompanied the early modern European colonial expansion, before global Western hegemony. Subsequently, religious pluralization has become accelerated in our contemporary global age to such an extent that it is beginning to transform in the process also the heartlands of European secularization.

European modernity leads to secularization but not necessarily to religious pluralization, at least not within the European nation-states. Globalization leads to religious pluralization but not necessarily to secularization. The intertwinement of both processes is what produces the combination of the two types of pluralism and the simultaneity of global religious and secular dynamics. In the first part of my paper, I want to examine the ways in which secular and religious dynamics are becoming intertwined everywhere through the globalization of the secular immanent frame and through the ongoing process of interreligious mutual recognition, which I call global denominationalism.

The immanent frame, a concept developed by Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, refers to the emergence of the modern institutional structures of democratic states, economic markets, scientific institutions, and mass media, all of which are secular and immanent, that is, without any vertical transcendent referent, and thus function *etsi deus non daretur*, as if God would not exist. The expression goes back to Hugo Grotius' attempt to ground a system of international law without any divine or transcendent referent. In this respect, the early modern Westphalian system of states was a secular one. Each of the states assumed absolute sovereignty vis a vis the other, even if each of them was also simultaneously a confessional state, in the sense that they enforced the religious confessionalization of their subjects.

The first truly modern secular state, however, the United States, was born as a secular state without any previous process of confessionalization. It was based, from its inception, on a wall of separation between church and state, instituted by the dual clause of the First Amendment, which prohibited any religious establishment at the state level, while protecting the free exercise of each and all religions in civil society. As the history of the United States shows, however, separation of church and state does not mean the separation of religion and politics, and the secularization of the state can go hand in hand with periodical religious revivals of all kinds within society.

It is obvious that capitalist markets also function as if God would not exist, even though some of the global capitalist tycoons, in the United States or in many Muslim countries, may be religious believers. Similarly, American scientific institutions, which as we know have produced a majority of Nobel Prizes in the sciences since World War II, also function *etsi deus non daretur*. Yet, some of the scientists may possibly be believers and certainly, large sectors of the American population may believe in Creationism, in the same way as other sectors of the American population may believe in Darwin-

ian evolutionism. In other words, the global secular immanent frame is compatible with all kinds of religious dynamics at the individual as well as the institutional level.

Similarly, in the rest of the world, the globalization of the immanent frame is not necessarily accompanied by the exit from religion, that is by the privatization and decline of religion. It may be accompanied, rather, by all types of religious transformations, in different directions, as the religious/secular binary system of classification that emerged within Western Christianity enters into the dynamic, transformative interaction with all non-Western systems of classification. All the religio-cultural systems, Christian and non-Christian, Western and non-Western, have been and continue being transformed through these global interactive dynamics.

Everywhere, the global expansion of the immanent frame leads to the institutionalization of different kinds of secular regimes, which become interconnected with different religious dynamics. It should be noted, however, that when people around the world use the same category of religion, they actually mean very different things. The actual concrete meaning of whatever people denominate as religion can only be elucidated in the context of their particular discursive practices. But the very fact that the same category of religion is being used globally across cultures and civilizations testifies to the global expansion of the modern secular-religious system of classification of reality which first emerged in the modern Christian West.

While the religious/secular system of classification of reality may have become globalized, what remains hotly disputed and debated almost everywhere in the world today is how, where, and by whom the proper boundaries between the religious and the secular ought to be drawn. There are in this respect multiple competing secularisms, as there are multiple and diverse forms of religious resistance to those secularisms.

Paradoxically, the global institutionalization of the secular immanent frame becomes the very guarantor of the post-axial secular/religious system, which guarantees the equal, non-hierarchic free exercise of religion to all forms of religion, pre-axial, axial, and post-axial. Indeed, what characterizes the contemporary global moment is the fact that all forms of human religion, past and present, from the most primitive to the most postmodern, are available for individual and collective appropriation. Equally relevant, moreover, is the fact that increasingly they must learn to coexist side by side in today's global cities. This contemporary social fact tends to put into question all teleological schemes of religious rationalization and development which tended to place primitive and traditional forms of religion as older human cultural forms to be superseded by more modern, secular, and rational ones.

While nationally, religious dynamics are mainly conditioned by particular forms of secular regimes and by different patterns of state management of religious freedom and religious pluralism, at the global level we are clearly witnessing the emergence of what I call global denominationalism.

It is the proliferation of de-territorialized transnational global imagined communities, or global *ummas,* that I call the emerging global denomina-

tionalism. This global denominationalism today encompasses the so-called old world religions (all the isms: Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, etc., all names which only became widely used in the 19th century, when what we today call Islam was usually denominated Muhammedism), as well as many new forms of hybrid globalized religions, such as the Bahais, Moonies, Hare Krishnas, Afro-American religions, Falun Gong, etc. These global religious denominations today compete with many other forms of secular imagined communities as well as with modern nationalism. The emerging global denominationalism, in this respect, includes religious as well as secular denominations.

By denominationalism, I mean a system of mutual recognition of groups within society. It is the name we give to ourselves and the name by which others recognize us. Indeed, distinctive of the American system of religious denominationalism is the fact that it is not state regulated, that it is voluntary, and that it is a system of mutual recognition of group identities.

The process of constitution of a global system of religions can best be understood as a process of global religious denominationalism, at the level of global civil society, whereby all the so-called world religions are redefined and transformed, in contraposition to the secular, through interrelated reciprocal processes of particularistic differentiation, universalistic claims, and mutual recognition. As Roland Robertson has emphasized, universal particularism and particular universalism are intrinsically interrelated and inherent to processes of globalization. Each world religion claims its universal right to be unique and different, thus its particularism, while at the same time presenting itself globally as a universal path for all of humanity. Like internal denominationalism in the United States, global denominationalism is emerging as a self-regulated system of religious pluralism and mutual recognition of religious groups in global civil society. Global denominationalism emerges through a process of mutual recognition of particular and universal claims.

Looking at interreligious and religious-secular conflicts around the world, it is evident that the ongoing process of mutual recognition of all religions and of mutual recognition of the religious and the secular is not smooth and may be accompanied by violent conflicts between religious groups as well as between religious and secular worldviews. It is all part of the global struggle for universal-particular, human mutual recognition.

It is an open empirical question, which should be the central focus of a global sociology of religion, how these ongoing global processes of secularization, sacralization, and religious denominationalism are mutually interrelated in different civilizations, sometimes symbiotically, as in religious nationalist fusions, or in the religious defense of human rights, but often antagonistically, as in the violent conflicts between the sacred secular immanent norm of freedom of expression and transcendent theistic norms, which believers want to protect from blasphemy.

Let me reiterate once again that global humanity is becoming simultaneously more religious and more secular, but in significantly different ways, in different types of secular regimes, in different religious traditions, and in

different civilizations. What characterizes our contemporary global secular age is the fact that, as pointed out by the German sociologist Hans Joas, "faith is an option" that cannot be taken for granted.[4] This means that both, belief and nonbelief become options for individuals as well as for communities.

The Faith and Beliefs of Nonbelievers

Now that we have examined the conditions of belief and nonbelief in our global secular age, we can enter into an examination of the forms and types of modern nonbelief. While the social sciences have been studying, religion, religious phenomena, and religious beliefs and practices for over two hundred years, research on the other of religion, on the secular, is only in its beginning stage. Indeed, until very recently, the sociology of religion in the West, particularly in Europe, was singlehandedly dedicated to the study of secularization, that is, to document the decline of religious beliefs and practices in modern secular societies. But practically, no social scientist expressed any interest in studying the secular.

Apparently, social scientists had been working under the assumption of what Charles Taylor has called "the subtraction theory of the secular." Namely, the secular was understood to be the natural anthropological substratum that subsists once the super-structural unnecessary addition of the supernatural is removed. As anthropologically natural, therefore, the secular can be taken for granted and does not need to be studied.

It was only 20 years ago that the anthropologist Talal Asad expressed for the first time the need to develop an anthropology of the secular. Since then, calls for the development of a comparative sociology and phenomenology of the secular and for the comparative research in multiple types of secularities and secularisms have proliferated.

Above all, it was the dramatic growth of the nones in the United States in the last decades, particularly among the younger generations, that has fostered the interest in examining the beliefs and worldviews of nonbelievers. In this context, the Templeton project on *The Faith and Beliefs of "Nonbelievers,"* of which this paper is a part, is of enormous relevance. Particularly significant is to attempt to develop comparative analyses of the nones in Eastern (post-Soviet) and in Western European societies.

The nones as a category refers simply to those who in sociological surveys in the United States, when asked for their religious affiliation mark the category none which appears at the bottom of a long list of religious denominations (such main line Protestant, Evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.). In this respect, it refers simply to those who claim no religious affiliation. The proportion of nones in the United States in the last two decades has grown significantly from ca. 8% of

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[4] Hans Joas, *Faith as an Option: Possible Futures for Christianity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

the population in the year 2000 to ca. 24% of the population today. Further inquiries, however, have shown that the nones can be subdivided into three different categories: (a) unaffiliated religious (which in Europe tend to be characterized as believing without belonging), (b) spiritual not religious, or individual spiritual seekers, and (c) nonbelievers proper, a group which includes reflexive agnostics, secular humanists, and atheists, as well as simply unreflexive nonbelievers.

Following this classification, I am going to briefly explore these four categories from a global comparative perspective.

Believers without Belonging

Secularization in Western Europe has taken primarily the form of un-churching (i.e., *Entkirchlichung*), which can best be understood as a form of liberation from the type of territorialized confessional religiosity, which was the legacy of the Westphalian system and its dynamics of state-enforced confessionalization under the principle *cuius regio eius religio*, that is, the sovereign determines the religious confession of his or her subjects. European Christianity, for all kinds of reasons, never made the full historical transition from territorial national churches based on the territorial parish or *Pfarrge-meinde,* to competing religious denominations in civil society based on voluntary religious associations, which following Tocqueville's analysis one can see as the paradigmatic form of the modern religious community. In this respect, Europeans tend to break away from their national churches without ever looking for alternative religious communities. They simply become un-affiliated.

Public opinion surveys make evident that while there has been a drastic decline in church affiliation and in church religious practices, a majority of the population in most European countries still maintains a general belief in God. But those surveys also make evident that the depth and extent of individual religiosity across Europe is rather low, in so far as those who profess belief in a personal God, those who pray with some regularity, and those who claim to have had some personal religious experience are a small minority in most Western European countries.

The situation in most post-Soviet Eastern European societies is mixed. East Germany and the Czech Republic show no evidence of any significant religious revival and remain as secular as they were under communist regimes, indeed the two most secularized societies in all of Europe.

Poland, despite some mild secularization, remains the most religious society in Europe with very high levels of religious belief in God (ca. 95%), of Catholic affiliation (ca. 92%) and, although significantly diminished in comparison to the Solidarity period, it still maintains very high levels of regular religious practice (ca. 50%).

Russia, like most other Eastern Orthodox societies, has evinced a significant religious revival after the fall of communism. Particularly, there has

been an increasing self-identification of the majority of the Russian Slavic population as Orthodox, from 31% in 1991 to 69% in 2011. Parallel to it, the proportion of the Russian Slavic population who self-identifies as nonreligious has decreased at a similar rate from 61% to 22%. However, increasing affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church does not denote the traditional meaning of allegiance to the true faith and the right doxa, but rather the modern confessional identity as members of the Russian Orthodox nation, as a typical form of belonging without believing, also present in Nordic Lutheran countries. In fact, regular religious practice in Russia remains very low, hovering at 4% of the population. Although it rises significantly on Easter and other major holidays, still half of the population claims to never attend church. In terms of the entire population of the Russian Federation, the distribution of believers and nonbelievers is the following: Orthodox (43%), other religions (15%), spiritual not religious (25%), and atheist nonreligious (13%).

Ukraine shows a deeper religious revival after communism, with a highly pluralist and fluid religious field with various competing Orthodox denominations, a significant Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and significant Protestant, Jewish and Muslim minorities. However, the Orthodox majority, hovering around 75%, shows very soft levels of confessionalization. According to the most recent survey from the Razumkov Center in January 2020, one year after the Tomos of autocephaly to the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), the religious affiliation in Ukraine was the following: OCU (34%), UOC-MP (13.8%), simply orthodox (27.6), Greek-Catholic (8.2%), Protestants and Evangelicals (1%), other religions (1%), non-denominational Christians (8.8%), and nonbelievers (5.6%).[5] Together, the simply Orthodox and the simply Christian, both forms of believing without denominational belonging, constitute over 36% of the Ukrainian population. The proportion of atheists and nonbelievers has decreased significantly in the last decades and is less than 1% in the Western oblasts and less than 10% in the Eastern and Southern oblasts. Regular church attendance reaches 21%, with significant difference between the Western oblasts (34%) and the Eastern and Southern oblasts (13%). Among the church affiliated, regular church attendance is higher, ca. 32% of Orthodox and ca. 45% of Greek Catholics attend church weekly. Even among the unaffiliated (simply orthodox and simply Christian) weekly church attendance nears 10%, a proportion which is much higher than in Russia. Those data are particularly significant if one considers the fact that over 60% of the Ukrainian population indicate that they were not brought up religiously at home.

The condition of believing without belonging has been the traditional condition of religious life in most cultures of Asia for millennia. Most Asian religions until very recently had no tradition of religious affiliation or mem-

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[5] Y. Yakymenko, A. Bychenko, M. Mischchenko, and L. Shanina, *War and Church: Church and Religious Situation in Ukraine in 2022* (Kyiv: Razumonkov Centre, 2022), 4-9, https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/02/13/2022_Religiya_ENGL.pdf.

bership, and no normative tradition of regular weekly temple attendance. Thus, a majority of the population in China or Japan, when asked about their religious affiliation may also indicate none of the above, when in fact they may follow Confucian ethics, may visit indiscriminately diverse temples (Buddhist, Taoist, Shinto, etc.) and may offer regularly gifts and prayers to their ancestors in their home altar.

Spiritual, Not Religious

This is a category that has attained increasing relevance in the modern secular age. It denotes particularly a negative attitude towards institutional organized religion, with a reluctance to identify oneself as a non-believing secular materialist. It signifies a relative openness towards some form of transcendence, which may have the most diverse expressions: from the seekers of individual paths of self-expression, such as the forms described by Robert Bellah as Sheilaism and by Thomas Luckmann as invisible religion; to those seekers who are attuned to various paths of Eastern mysticism, such as yoga or Buddhist meditation; to various forms of New Age spirituality; to diverse forms of spiritism and animism, which find expression in interest in the occult and paranormal phenomena, as well as in gnostic forms of science fiction, Manichean cosmic struggles and extraterrestrial life.[6]

The category of spiritual not religious takes diverse forms throughout the globe. It is perhaps less relevant in highly secular post-Christian Western Europe, with some significant exceptions in Scandinavia and the British Isles. As already indicated, it is widespread in post-Soviet Russia (25%); it is significant throughout the Americas from the United States to Brazil, the land where the most diverse forms of espiritismo flourish; animism and spiritism permeates all African and most Asian cultures.

It also finds high intellectual expression in many of the manifestos of avant-garde modernist art, from abstract cubism to surrealism and futurism; in self-definitions of the spiritual East against the materialist West; and in all kinds of critique of materialist capitalism, most significantly in the growing ecological consciousness, that finds such diverse expressions as vegetarianism, green movements, and reverence for living nature, mother Earth and the cosmos.[7]

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[6] Wikipedia, "Sheilaism," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheilaism (accessed March 27, 2023); Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (New York: MacMillan, 1967).

[7] Peter van der Veer, "Spirituality in Modern Society," *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 1097-1120.

Reflexive Rejectionists of Theist Transcendence:
Agnostics, Secular Humanists, and Atheists

Modern reflexive atheism denies the existence of God for any of three related rationales: a) radical agnosticism, which for cognitive-epistemological reasons denies the very possibility of postulating such a supra-empirical or super-natural reality or of making meaningful assertions about such reality on linguistic analytical grounds; b) self-sufficient secular humanism that rejects any transcendence beyond human flourishing as a form of theo-nomic dependency that deprives humans of their autonomy or as otherworldly projection that wastes human energies in futile otherworldly pursuits that should be redirected toward this-worldly utilitarian pursuits; and c) radical anti-theists that reject on moral grounds the existence of an unjust God responsible for an imperfect universe or for the suffering and injustices of humanity.

To all three rationales, one can respond with the famous anecdote of the person who, during the times of the troubles in Northern Ireland, crossing a checkpoint from a Catholic to a Protestant neighborhood, was confronted with an armed militia man, who cried "hands up," "Catholic or Protestant?" "No, no," he responded, "I am an atheist!" "Yes, but which one?"

There is no such a thing as atheism in the abstract. In concrete terms, which is the God one denies? Is it a post-Protestant, a post-Catholic, a post-Jewish, a post-Muslim, a post-Hindu, a post-Buddhist, etc.? In the same sense, there is no secularity in the abstract, the multiple forms of secularity are so many transformations of religious experiences and worldviews. That is why it is necessary to develop a comparative sociology, anthropology, and phenomenology of multiple forms of secularity, as forms of diverse post-religious experiences.

Unreflexive Secularity: Being Simply Secular without Religion

At least in Europe, this is probably the most-widespread, almost taken for granted, form of nonbelief. Self-contained, self-sufficient secularity is tied to the phenomenological experience of living without religion as a normal, quasi-natural, taken for granted reality. The naturalization of nonbelief or irreligiosity as the normal modern human condition is a characterization that certainly applies to a majority of Western post-Christian societies.

Self-sufficient secularity, that is, the absence of religion has a better chance of becoming the normal taken-for-granted position, if it is experienced not simply as an unreflexive, naïve condition, as just a fact, but actually it is perceived as the meaningful result of a quasi-natural process of development.

As Taylor has pointed out, modern nonbelief is not simply a condition or absence of belief, nor merely indifference. It is a historical condition that requires the perfect tense, a condition of having overcome the irrationality of belief. Intrinsic to this phenomenological experience is a modern stadial consciousness, inherited from the Enlightenment, which understands this anthro-

pocentric change in the conditions of belief as a process of maturation and growth, as a coming of age, and as progressive emancipation.

For Taylor, this stadial phenomenological experience serves to ground the experience of exclusive humanism as the positive self-sufficient and self-limiting affirmation of human flourishing and as the critical rejection of transcendence as self-denial and self-defeating.

This historical self-understanding of secularism has the function of confirming the superiority of our modern secular outlook over other supposedly earlier and therefore more primitive religious forms of understanding. To be secular means to be modern, and therefore by implication to be religious means to be somehow not fully modern. This is the ratchet effect of a modern historical stadial consciousness which turns the very idea of going back to a surpassed condition into an unthinkable intellectual regression.

This secularist stadial consciousness is a crucial factor in the widespread secularization that has accompanied the modernization of Western European societies. Europeans tend to experience their own secularization, that is, the widespread decline of religious beliefs and practices in their midst as a natural consequence of their becoming modern individuals. In this respect, the European theory of secularization mediated through this historical stadial consciousness tends to function as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In non-European societies, where processes of modernization are not associated phenomenologically with such a historical stadial consciousness, the experience of modernity may be associated not with secularity but with different forms of religious revival and individual religious affirmation.

But following Max Weber one may postulate that the death of God in Nietzschean terms, opens the way for new forms of modern polytheism in which individuals can freely choose the gods they prefer to worship: Eros/Venus, Athena, Mars, Mammon, etc. One is reminded of the classic film by Passolini, *Theorema*, in which each member of the family seeks salvation through the most diverse paths and practices.

Here is where the project on *The Faith and Beliefs of "Nonbelievers"* is extremely promising if it is able to illuminate the values which drive and inform the worldviews and practices of ordinary modern nonbelievers in different national and societal contexts.

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The Great Transformation of Religion and the Catholic Church[1]

STAF HELLEMANS

The title of this paper contains two main ideas. First, we are witnessing in our time – that is, since the 1950s-1960s – the beginning of a historically fundamental and great transformation of religion. Second, the changes that the Catholic Church has gone through in this time are no less fundamental and are part of this great transformation of religion. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify these two intertwined ideas – the great transformation of religion in general and its repercussions for and resonance within the Catholic Church. The expression "great transformation" is taken from a book by the economic historian Karl Polanyi on the breakthrough of the market as the leading economic mechanism in modernity.[2] By analogy, I use his expression to point to the very profound changes in religion in the recent and coming decades.[3]

I elaborate on the idea of a great transformation of religion in four major propositions or theses. Their unfolding structures this paper. The first thesis is that we are experiencing what I call the end of the age of world religions. By that I mean the end of two thousand years of history in which a few major religions – Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism – dominated religion and society. The second thesis is that the secularization process must be regarded as being part of the end of this age. Secularization describes the decline of the impact of these major religions on people and society. Secularization is an important trend, but it does not mean the end of religion as such. The third thesis contains a double proposition. Religion, which, for a long time, was cast in the framework of a few world religions, is changing into a diverse and turbulent field. The old, no longer dominant world religions remain active on a smaller scale, but they now move alongside many other, often unstable, groups and initiatives. Moreover, while the major religions used to colonize other domains such as science, education, and politics, activities of a religious and quasi-religious nature are now undertaken in many domains – such as leisure and the arts – which are considered nonreligious. The consequence of all this is a partial dissolution (or de-differentiation) of religion as a field or domain. I summarize these three major developments – the end of the age of world religions, secularization, and the emergence of and, at the same time, the partial dissolution of a diverse and

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[1] Translation of my valedictory lecture, *De grote transformatie van religie en van de katholieke kerk*, delivered in Dutch at Tilburg University on May 24, 2019.

[2] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001).

[3] Patrick Pasture, "Religion in Contemporary Europe. Contrasting Perceptions and Dynamics," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 49 (2009): 319.

turbulent field of religion – under the heading of the great transformation of religion. The fourth and final part of my paper will deal with the repercussions and reverberations of this great transformation of religion for the very recognizable and heavily organized religious organization which is the Catholic Church and I limit myself in this last part to the West. The Catholic Church – and the other main and smaller churches – faces an enormous challenge: how to function in a world after the end of the age of world religions, and how to function as a much smaller church, one that is no longer central to society or even to the completely altered religious field. I study the Catholic Church here as a case study, as one case among many large, medium, and smaller churches in late modern Western society.

I am well aware that this undertaking – to outline the global transformation of religion and the Catholic Church – is extremely risky. After all, the future could prove me wrong in every respect. I hope, of course, that this will not be the case. However, designing comprehensive and scientifically based visions seems to me more important than the risks.[4] In addition to the risky nature of conjecturing encompassing visions, I also realize, of course, that much of what I write in this paper has already been said by others. That is a good thing: science relies on the work of others. The vision I propose is based on sociology. The analysis strives to be sober and detached, aimed at describing accurately the factual evolution and change of religion and the Catholic Church. For theologians and other church-engaged people with an inside perspective and a tendency to defend their turf, my analysis may seem overly pessimistic. Sociology, however, must be practiced *sine ira et studio* – without resentment against, or without exaggerated enthusiasm for a cause – even at the risk of being considered a modern Cassandra.

The End of the Age of World Religions

Speaking about the great transformation of religion means that the religious landscape no longer is as it was before. A deep rupture and a structural discontinuity in this landscape have both occurred. Thus, before analyzing its current and future evolution, we must first understand the specific features of the previous phase of this religious landscape. The main feature of the previous phase, I dare say, is the great dominance of a limited number of major religions – and that dominance increased over time, i.e., over the last two

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[4] Diederik Aerts, Leo Apostel, Bart De Moor, Staf Hellemans, Ron Lesthaeghe, Edel Maex, Hubert Van Belle, Jan Van Der Veken, R. Van Geen, and J. Van Landschoot, *Worldviews. From fragmentation to integration* (Kapellen: DNB/ Pelckmans, 1994).

thousand years. The age of world religions is the expression that I will use to refer to this historical phase in religious history.[5]

The Axial Age and the Emergence of Axial and Post-Axial Religions

To describe this previous phase and the emergence of world religions, I resort to the so-called axial age theory, originally proposed by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers,[6] and further developed, from the 1980s onward, by the historical sociologists Shmuel Eisenstadt[7] and Robert Bellah.[8]

This theory posits that both the major religions we know today, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and the great comprehensive philosophies with ethical consequences, such as Greek philosophy and Chinese Confucianism, all originated in the first millennium before Christ. The major breakthrough of these religions and philosophies would have occurred in the middle of that millennium, in the centuries between 800BC and 200BC. That period forms a kind of axis in the world history of religion – hence the name axial age theory and axial or post-axial religions. The religions and philosophies before this axial age period are of interest only to researchers. In contrast, the axial ideas (think of the idea of a monotheistic God) still fascinate us today. Note that the two largest religions in our time, Christianity and Islam, actually originated after the axial age, strictly speaking. However, they are both highly indebted to Judaism (and Islam also to Christianity). In summary, we can say that a new type of religion and philosophy emerged in the axial age and that, from that point on, these axial or post-axial religions would largely go on to define the subsequent history of religion. They are characterized by a higher conception of the Holy, going beyond lower gods and spirits, and by a universal conception of the world and humanity. At the same time, they are better attuned to the drama of the individual person and his relation with the collective and the cosmos.[9]

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[5] Staf Hellemans, *Het tijdperk van de wereldreligies. Religie in agrarische civilisaties en in moderne samenlevingen* (Zoetermeer/Kapellen: Meinema/Pelckmans, 2007).

[6] Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (München: Piper, 1983).

[7] Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "The axial age: the emergence of transcendental visions and the rise of clerics," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 23, no. 2 (1982): 293-314; Idem, *Kulturen der Achsenzeit I und II* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987); Idem, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (2 volumes) (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2003).

[8] Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution. From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2011); Robert Bellah and Hans Joas, eds., *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). See my interpretation in Hellemans, *Het tijdperk van de wereldreligies,* 45-98.

[9] See, especially, Eisenstadt, "The Axial Age."

The Age of World Religions or the Growth of a Few Major Religions

The major religions started out hesitantly and small, as insignificant movements with religious reformers leading them (e.g., Jesus of Nazareth and Christianity in the first century). Over time, not all but some of these axial religions grew larger and stronger. Thanks to their universalism, they also spread beyond their original borders. Since the mid-nineteenth century, we have referred to these major religions as world religions, i.e., religions that are spread throughout the world. This is especially true of the big four: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. On the other hand, there are many axial religions that have remained on the margins or were relegated to the margins, for example, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism in ancient Persia or the so-called mystery religions in the Roman Empire. Why some religions grew larger and others did not is an interesting and long-running debate in the history of religion, which we will not address here. For our purposes, we are only interested in the few axial religions that have been able to grow, allowing us to describe the last 2,500 years as the age of world religions.

Let us first look at the quantitative evolution of these world religions. Although it is difficult to find statistics from before the 1900s, the four largest religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism) have been very successful and still are. In fact, their reach has increased over the past hundred years. In 1910, according to the demographers Johnson and Grim,[10] 68.0% of the world's population was affiliated in some way with one of these four religions. By 2010, this figure had risen to 76.3%. The increase, as in past centuries, has come mainly at the expense of folk and tribal religions. As the world's population has increased dramatically since 1900, the recent growth in absolute numbers of the four largest world religions is even more impressive. Between 1910 and 2010, the number of adherents of these world religions more than quadrupled (from 1.195 billion in 1910 to 5.258 billion in 2010): Christians increased from about 600 million to 2.2 billion, Muslims from 220 million to more than 1.5 billion, Hindus from 220 million to 950 million, and Buddhists from 140 million to nearly 500 million. I conclude that the major religions in world history have continued to grow even at a more accelerated rate in modern times. They now make up more than three-quarters of the world's population.

In addition to quantitative growth, there is important qualitative evidence that underscores the centrality of world religions to the civilizations in which they were and are active. First of all, each of these major religions has left deep traces in the civilization to which they belong. That is why we speak of the Christian West, the Muslim Middle East, Buddhist Southeast Asia, etc. Politics, science, education, art, and also everyday life were strongly influenced by these great religions. The European Middle Ages were therefore

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[10] Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures. An Introduction to International Religious Demography* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 10.

often called the Christian Middle Ages, which sometimes led to an over-estimation of their Christian character.[11] This immense impact was possible because these religions managed to build particularly robust religious institutions aimed at reaching everyone: by promoting the role of religious specialists (priests, ulama, brahmins, monks), the canonization of core scriptures and core practices (rituals and meditation), and the construction of a normatively based, supra-local community (umma, sangha) or organization (Christian churches). This strong institutionalization was exceptional, especially in pre-modern societies. Because of their robustness, the major religions were usually able to survive regime and dynastic change. Moreover, the major religions were able to reach the majority of a population in their core civilizations. This, too, was exceptional – even the dynastic states failed in doing this – though, of course, there were great differences in the amount and nature of the affiliation, both geographically and by social status. The institutional clout of the major world religions did not immediately diminish as they approached and entered modernity. Although religion became increasingly differentiated from other fields or subsystems,[12] the major religions retained their dominance in the West until after World War II, and outside the West until today.

In conclusion, during and after the first millennium BCE, a new kind of religion emerged. Some of these axial and post-axial religions grew into the major religions we know today, into what we have called, since the nineteenth century, world religions. They reached entire populations; they were much more institutionalized; and they were designed for universal spread. Their growth dynamics began in the axial age and were linked in the premodern era to great political empires (e.g., the Roman Empire, Emperor Ashoka in India, Han China). This dynamic has continued over time and, moreover, has not lost momentum in the transition to, or in, the first centuries of modernity. Thus, this long phase in the history of religion, in which a few major religions increasingly came to dominate the religious field in the world's great civilizations, can rightly be called the age of world religions.

Three Key Adjustments

Nevertheless, some adjustments and clarifications of the axial age thesis seem necessary. First, the transition to world religions did not occur as

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[11] For a re-evaluation, see John Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (1986): 519-552.

[12] See, especially, Niklas Luhmann, "Die Ausdifferenzierung der Religion," in Idem, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*, Band 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 149-258, and, building on him, Peter Beyer, *Religion in Global Society* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006).

quickly as Jaspers himself and the term axial age seem to suggest.[13] Major transformations in world history take time to become fully manifested. Several building blocks must be developed – such as a universalist orientation, the supra-local organization of a religion, frequent use of scripture, an individually oriented doctrine of salvation and, crucially, the building blocks must be brought together in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Only then can a new dynamic fully develop. A lot of time was needed for this to happen. Hence, around 500 BCE, no hard break, no sudden emergence of major religions can be observed, but only a cautious beginning of a new dynamic, which became stronger with time. Moreover, some axial beginnings were launched earlier – it is now thought that Zarathustra lived around the year 1000 BCE – and most developments took place at a later date. Buddhism broke through in India under the patronage of Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE. The institutionalization of Confucianism in China took place during the Han Dynasty in the second century BCE. The transformation of the Vedic religions into what we now call Hinduism stretched over a period of more than 1000 years. And, above all, the rise of Christianity and Islam, the two major world religions, did not occur until many centuries after the axial age in the strict sense.

Second, some caution should be exercised when using the term world religion. In recent decades, criticism of the term has been so massive[14] that many now try to avoid the term altogether and use substitutes such as major religions or main religions of the world. The term world religion was coined in the nineteenth century by analogy with the Western colonial term world powers, by the way, the latter expression is still used today without hesitation. The association with Western world domination is, of course, missing here, especially since three of the four major religions were and are dominant in the non-Western world. The term world religion is used here only in its minimal sense, as in the English substitutes just mentioned, namely, as a synonym for a major religion, for a religious tradition spread throughout the world.

Finally, not only the term world religion but also the term religion itself has come under fire because it seems to suggest a unity that is absent in reality. It is true that religions can no longer be viewed as self-contained vessels that are reliably cleaving through the seas of world history, as independent units free from the many contexts in which they thrive.[15] On the contrary, a religious tradition should be seen as a loosely connected cluster, not to mention as an amalgam of ideas, practices, and institutional forms. It is

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[13] See, e.g., Stroumsa's critique of Bellah in Guy G. Stroumsa, "Robert Bellah on the Origins of Religion. A Critical Review," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, no. 4 (2012): 467-477.

[14] See, among others, Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions. Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[15] Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

created over and over again, in all times and in very different contexts, by people who selectively take and modify elements of their religious tradition, mix them with other material, and thus change and pluralize the religious tradition anew in every act and every thought. It takes a lot, especially from the leaders of religious organizations and their thinkers, the theologians, to homogenize all these pluralizing events and persons into a so-called religious tradition and religion. In fact, for any religion – and for any subdivision – one should always use the plural form: Christianities – Catholicisms,[16] Islams, Buddhisms, etc.

Only when these adjustments are made does it make sense to hypothesize an age of world religions as a historical phase in the world history of religion. Beginning in the first millennium BCE and lasting into our time, it is characterized by the dominance of a few major religions.

The End of an Age

Given the long duration of the age of world religions and the fact that world religions are quantitatively stronger than ever, it seems a bold, even reckless, assertion that we are nearing the end of this era. Nevertheless, I would like to make this assertion. Let me first clarify what the statement might mean and then give some indications.

The age of world religions as an expression refers to the phase in religious history when some axial religions became the dominant religions in the world. Thus, there is a time before the age of world religions, the time of the so-called tribal and archaic religions,[17] and a time after the age of world religions, the plausibility of which I will try to demonstrate. I think it is good to start with what the thesis of the end of the age of world religions certainly does not mean, namely, that religion as such will disappear or that the world religions will disappear. The thesis merely states that the world's major religions will no longer dominate society and the religious field in the future. Thus, we will have to look for indications of a possible decline of the major world religions. In fact, the figures given above make it clear that the age of world religions is not over yet, rather, their share has increased in the twentieth century, thanks to the further inclusion of pre-modern areas in the modern world, especially in Africa, and thanks to the particularly strong demographic growth in the non-Western world. So, it will be a long time – from several decades to several centuries – before the domination of these religions will be over. However, what I expect is that the reach of world religions is at its

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[16] Staf Hellemans and Gerard Rouwhorst, eds., *The Making of Christianities in History. A Processing Approach* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020).

[17] We will not discuss this. See Yves Lambert, *La naissance des religions: De la préhistoire aux religions universalistes* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007) and Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution,* 117-264.

peak now and will decline in the future. In the West and in some non-Western countries, the end of this age has already begun.

Three fundamental trends, I believe, are behind the decline of world religions: secularization, the emergence of new, less institutionalized religions, and the dissolution of the religious field. I would like to use these important clues to clarify the beginning of the end of the age of world religions and the dawn of a new era in the world history of religion. I assume that the modernization of the non-Western world will eventually lead there too, to changes in the religious field that we are already seeing germinating in the West. I am aware that these two assumptions – the end of the age of world religions in the West and its subsequent spread to the rest of the world – are two far from obvious assumptions and that many, for good reasons, reject them. It is quite possible that my living in two highly secularized countries, Belgium and the Netherlands, is responsible for my penchant toward this view. Because of the vitality of Christianity in the United States, researchers there – at least until recently – tended to defend the opposite thesis, namely, the continued dominance of world religions.[18] I believe, however, that late modernity is reshuffling the cards for religion. I will first address the trend toward secularization. This is followed by a joint analysis of the two other indications of the beginning of the end of the age of world religions and the beginning of a new era, namely, the diversification and partial dissolution of the religious field.

Secularization: An Important Facet of the Great Transformation

I consider secularization an important part of the processes leading to the end of the age of world religions.

Secularization as the Decline of Organized Religion

Let me first clarify what I mean by secularization. It should be reiterated here that secularization does not herald the end of religion as such, but merely the end of the dominance of a few world religions. In the West, in our corner of the world, it means the end of the monopoly and absolute dominance of a few major churches. Secularization in the West thus roughly coincides with de-churching. But since the decline of organized religion is also occurring outside the West and will, I believe, deepen there as well, we need a broader term than de-churching, which applies only to Christianity. Secularization seems to me an appropriate term and is already widely used. Accordingly, I will define secularization as the quantitative decline of the dominant, heavily

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[18] See the influential essay by Peter Berger, "The Desecularization of the World. A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter Berger (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 1-18.

organized religions of the past, rather than the decline being offset by the emergence of new organized religions. Indeed, the most striking feature of the contemporary religious field in the West is the loss of influence of the old religions on people and society without large, new religious organizations taking their place.

Secularization is a controversial concept and secularization theories are equally contested. It is therefore important to be well aware of the limitations of my definition of secularization as the decline of organized religion. First, as I said, secularization certainly does not culminate in the end of religion. Religion lives on, but more so in other forms (see the next section). Second, many qualitative changes in religion, both in the main religions of the past and in the new forms of religion, religiosity, and quasi-religiosity, are deliberately left out of the secularization approach, e.g., changes like individualization, new interpretations of God, greater input from lay people. Secularization primarily traces the quantitative decline – and possible increase – in the impact of religion on persons and society. This, of course, is only one facet of the evolution of religion. Finally, I would like to remind the reader that authors define secularization in diverse ways. Often, secularization refers to the differentiation of religion from other social domains such as the state, science, education, or health care.[19] I do not favor the latter definition because the process of differentiation, especially in the nineteenth century, was often accompanied by an increase in the importance of religion in society, for example, in the United States, the Netherlands, Flanders, and western and southern Germany. This definition gives rise to the confusing claim that secularization, understood as differentiation, leads to an increase in the importance of religion.[20] Differentiation plays a role in secularization, for sure, but it can go two ways, either toward secularization or toward an increase in the influence of organized religion. Since my definition of secularization includes only quantitative decrease (and de-secularization increase) for organized religion, my definition is limited. Therefore, in my opinion, secularization theory should always be modest, for it does not include the whole transformation process of religion, but only a part of that transformation. Even with its limited definition and its attendant modest ambitions, it is clear that secularization thematizes an important facet of the great transformation of religion. If secularization – always conceived in the modest sense of decline of organized religion – is a real trend and is becoming so in large parts of the world, then it will be a clear empirical indication that the dominance of heavily organized world religions is coming to an end. Now let's take a closer empirical look.

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[19] See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, IL/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Karel Dobbelaere, "Towards an Integrated Perspective of the Processes Related to the Descriptive Concept of Secularization," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 229-247.

[20] See, e.g., Rick Phillips, "Can Rising Rates of Church Participation be a Consequence of Secularization?," *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 2 (2004): 139-153.

From Western European Exception to Global Trend

If the thesis of the end of the age of world religions is to gain any plausibility, we must provide indications, preferably figures, that point to secularization, to the quantitative decline of organized religion, on a large and possibly global scale. As noted above, the four major world religions are still growing in absolute terms, but, with the exception of Islam, no longer in relative numbers. Behind this global picture, contrasting developments are transpiring: while the West is strongly secularizing and other parts of the world are also moving in the same direction, organized religion is still expanding in Africa and the Islamic world. In what follows, I will chart the secularization trend successively in the Netherlands, Europe, the United States, Latin America, and Japan.

It is well known that the Netherlands is a highly secularized country and that the decline of the main churches has taken massive forms. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) has been giving figures since the first census in 1849. In response to the question, "Which denomination do you belong to?" at that time, 0% answered "no denomination." The figure rose slowly before 1960 and faster after 1960. In 2017, it reached 50%. About half of the Dutch population no longer considers itself to belong to a denomination.

Table 1: Belonging to a church/religious denomination in the Netherlands according to CBS (Source: CBS)

	RCath	Ref	Reref	Other	None
1849	38	55	1	6	0
1899	35	48	8	6	2
1930	36	35	9	5	14
1960	40	28	9	4	18
1980	38	21	9	5	26
2000	32	14	7	8	40
2017	24	16		10	50

RCath=Roman Catholic; Ref=Dutch Reformed; Reref=Re-Reformed, i.e., those who split from the main Dutch Reformed Church

There are also figures from another Dutch research institute, the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP, now called in English, The Netherlands Institute for Social Research). They, too, ask about denominational membership, but they do so in two questions, namely: "Do you consider yourself belonging to a denomination? Yes-No." For those who answer "yes," they ask the further question: "To which denomination do you then consider yourself belonging?" Because the CBS single-stage question implicitly suggests that one

should belong to a denomination, the figures for church membership resulting from the SCP two-stage question are much lower – 28% in 2016 – and the figures for those who do not consider themselves to belong to a denomination are much higher – 72% in 2016. Regardless of the wording of the question, however, it is clear that in both cases there has been a significant decline since 1960 and that the decline is also continuing steadily.[21]

Table 2: Belonging to a church/religious denomination in the Netherlands according to SCP (Source: SCP)

	RCath	Ref	Reref	Other	None
1958	42	23	8	0	24
1970	34	16	8	3	39
1980	25	14	8	2	50
1991	22	11	7	4	57
2000	17	9	6	4	65
2004	17	6	4	8	64
2016					72

The trend toward secularization in the Netherlands could also be supported empirically by other indices: church attendance is declining, churchly beliefs, such as the imagining of God, are fading, the number of priests and ministers is decreasing, etc. Secularization cuts deep in the Netherlands. While organized religion, compared to other countries, was strong before 1960, the Netherlands is now among the most secularized countries in Europe. To continue with Europe, most countries are secularizing, albeit at a slower pace than in the Netherlands. In terms of secularization, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Estonia are at the top, closely followed by Belgium, France, and Britain. In Poland and Malta, however, the Catholic Church is still very strong, as is the position of the Orthodox churches in most countries in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. In some of these countries, such as Russia and Serbia, the rise of organized religion, especially of the national Orthodox churches, continues. However, in most Central and Eastern European countries, the religious revival after the fall of communism now seems to be over. What is certain is that the degree of secularization in Europe varies greatly from country to country – and, for that matter, from region to region in each country.

Because of the large following and strong influence of the world's major religions outside Europe, secularization in Europe, especially in Western

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[21] See also the most recent study by Ton Bernts and Joantine Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016).

Europe, has often been presented in recent decades as the proverbial exception. Only Western Europe would secularize; everywhere else, religion would be "alive and kicking."[22] Yet this Western European exceptionalism thesis is no longer convincing. Let us take the United States, which is often portrayed as the anti-example of secularization. Secularization is said to have barely gained a foothold in this country, although the United States is considered – and certainly wants to be considered – the standard-bearer of modernity. Indeed, organized religion continued to rank high there. After increases in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, church membership and attendance barely declined after 1960. In recent years, however, the numbers have shown a downturn. According to the Pew Research Center,[23] between 2007 and 2014, the unaffiliated, also known as nones, i.e., those who do not profess a denomination or religious tradition, increased from 16.1% to 22.8%. A large proportion of this category is young people, especially Millennials.[24] Almost a quarter of the population qualifies as nones, and this is rising rapidly though it is still only half of the Netherlands. Also interesting to note is that Protestants in the United States no longer constitute the majority of the population.

Table 3: Church Membership/Religious Membership USA 2007-2014
(Source: Pew Research Center, 2015)

	2007	2014
All Christians	78.4	70.6
All Protestants	51.3	46.5
- Evangelical Christians	26.3	25.4
- Mainline Christians	18.1	14.7
- Historic Black Christians	6.9	6.5
Catholic	23.9	20.8
Other Christians	3.3	3.3
Non-Christian Faiths	4.7	5.9
Unaffiliated	16.1	22.8
Don't know/refused	0.8	0.6

[22] Berger, "The Desecularization of the World" and Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

[23] Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," 20-32, https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape (accessed February 9, 2019).

[24] Similar figures in Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity. Findings from the 2016 American Values Atlas* (Washington, DC: PRRI, 2016), https://www.prri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf (accessed April 8, 2019).

The number of nones is also increasing in this country. According to another research institute that conducts the annual General Social Survey, the number of nones was only 3-5% in the 1950s and hovered around 7% from 1970 to the early 1990s. Only from the 1990s onward did the number of nones begin to rise steadily and significantly.[25] That the United States is not a counterexample to the secularization thesis was confirmed in an article by David Voas and Mark Chaves.[26] Secularization, measured threefold by these authors as a decline in church membership, church attendance, and belief in God, may have started later in the United States and occurred, so far, in slow motion, but the trend toward secularization, they argue, is the same as in Britain, Australia, and Canada. In all these countries, the trend is driven by generational replacement. In the United States, still according to Voas and Chaves, especially the younger generations, those born between 1975-1984 and 1985-1994, are less involved in religion.

We can, hence, conclude that the trend toward secularization is not just limited to Western Europe, but rather is occurring in most Western countries, with great differences from country to country and with the exception of some countries in Eastern Europe. The question now is whether the secularization trend is also visible outside the West. If secularization occurs only in the West, one can continue to maintain that we live in a world without secularization, with the exception of the West. This weakened exception thesis is, of course, less negative for secularization theories than the popular strong exception thesis that holds that secularization is a Western European exception. Nevertheless, given the increasing weight of the non-Western world, one could still continue to argue the watered-down exception thesis that secularization is a limited phenomenon and thus, all in all, a minor and idiosyncratic phenomenon on a global scale. But even this watered-down exception thesis cannot, in my view, be sustained. In some parts of the non-Western world, secularization is also beginning to increase. I am thinking particularly of Latin America and Japan.

Latin America was an entirely Catholic continent until a few decades ago. The entire population was Catholic. In recent decades, however, Protestantism, in its Evangelical and Pentecostal variants, has experienced a strong rise, and today has a following of about 20% of the Latin American population, with more in some countries (e.g., Honduras, Guatemala) and less in others (e.g., Mexico, Paraguay). Of course, the introduction and rise of Protestant movements in Latin America is not an example of secularization, but of religious change. But in recent years, as in the United States, the nones have also appeared in surveys. The most recent edition of the Latino-

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[25] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace. How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 122; similar figures in Jones and Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity*, 24-25.

[26] David Voas and Mark Chaves, "Is the United States a Counterexample to the Secularization Thesis?," *American Journal of Sociology* 121, no. 5 (2016): 1517-1556.

barometro, a Chile-based polling institute, gauged church adherence in 18
Latin American countries, asking, among other things, "What religion do you
consider yourself to belong to?"[27] Overall, 60% of Latin Americans consider
themselves Catholic, 19% count themselves as Evangelical Protestant, 3% as
belonging to other religious traditions, and 17% as belonging to no religious
tradition at all. As in Western countries, the proportion of nones fluctuates
very widely, from high – 41% in Uruguay – to negligible – 4% in Bolivia and
Paraguay. The increase of the nones is considerable: in 1995, the number of
nones in the whole of Latin America was only 4%. Sometimes change hap-
pens quickly. According to the same research institute, the number of nones
in Chile rose from 7% in 1995 to 35% in 2017, with an increase from 18% to
35% in the years 2010-2015. In 2010, the sexual abuse scandal in Chile
erupted. Atheists and agnostics, a subcategory of the nones, are especially
present among those under the age of 26. Two comments should be made
about these figures. First, atheists and agnostics in the nones category are a
minority – this is also the case elsewhere. Most nones are people with no
religious affiliation – which usually (!) means that one is not interested in
religion, but nones can have different meanings.[28] Secondly, I would like to
mention that a Pew Research Center survey[29] on religion in Latin America,
with data collected in late 2013-2014, gives a lower number of nones, 8%
compared to 69% Catholics and 19% Protestants. For comparison, in 2013
the Latinobarometro counted 11% nones. So, the figures for nones in the
Latinobarometro are slightly higher, most likely due to the different wording
of the question – think of the significant difference in percentages in the
Netherlands between CBS and SCP. Nevertheless, in the Pew Research
Center survey, in addition to the more obvious shift toward Protestantism,
there is as well a clear break toward the nones. After all, half of the nones
were raised religiously, mostly Catholic. I would therefore conclude that
secularization has penetrated Latin America as well, given the increase of the
nones, albeit in modest numbers, in recent years. Because young people are
expressing themselves much more as nones, and given the unfolding crisis of
the Catholic Church, it can be expected that secularization in Latin America
will gain momentum in the coming years.

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[27] Latinobarometro, *El Papa Francisco y la Religion en Chile y America Latina
1995-2017*, http://www.latinobarometro.org/latNewsShow.jsp (accessed February
20, 2019).

[28] See Andrew Singleton, "Are religious 'nones' secular? The case of the nones in
Australia," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 36, no. 2 (2015): 239-242; Linda Wood-
head, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain. The emergence of a new cultural majority,"
Journal of the British Academy 4 (2016): 245-261; Jones and Cox, *America's
Changing Religious Identity*, 26.

[29] Pew Research Center, "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a
Historically Catholic Region," 4, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/
sites/7/2014/11/Religion-in-Latin-America-11-12-PM-full-PDF.pdf (accessed Feb-
ruary 18, 2019).

Finally, I would like to cross over to Japan, a country with no Christian tradition. Since the main religious traditions at home there, Shinto and Buddhism, have no exclusive membership and no mandatory rituals such as Sunday Mass attendance, one cannot work with Western-inspired survey questions in Japan. Moreover, Japanese researchers themselves are often skeptical of the Western concept and theory of secularization.[30] Nevertheless, British Japanologist Ian Reader[31] argues that there is clear evidence of secularization in Japan. Surveys since the 1940s asking about faith, the importance of religion in life, and the image of religion all have shown an almost continuous decline. In addition, Buddhist temples are rapidly closing, especially in rural areas, or no longer have a resident monk. The popularity of many devotions and pilgrimages is also said to be declining. Reader concludes rather dramatically: "Religion may not be dead in Japan yet, but it is dying […]. [I]n two decades we will […] probably say, 'Religion R.I.P'."[32]

I am aware of the cursory nature of this overview. Nevertheless, I hope to have made it plausible that the thesis of secularization as Western European exceptionalism must be written off. Many countries in Eastern Europe are also secularizing as are the United States, Canada, and Australia. Secularization is also no longer a purely Western phenomenon; it is also emerging in Latin America and Japan. Certainly, there are wide variations in the degree of secularization. Large parts of the world have experienced an upsurge in organized religion in recent decades. However, I believe that the increase is now reaching a ceiling and that secularization will begin to manifest itself in a wider area. To support this claim, I will now frame the figures in the theory, or theories, that have been advanced on secularization.

A New Phase in the Sociological Debate on Secularization

Those who want to interpret figures correctly need theory. With regard to secularization, there is no shortage of theory – excess might be a more apt expression – because the question of secularization has long been the subject of intense and controversial debate. Philosophy and theology made a start after World War II with the so-called philosophy of secularization – think of Karl Löwith's 1953 book *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen*[33] – and with

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[30] Ugo Dessi, "Recent Developments in the Japanese Debate on Secularization," *Journal of Asian Humanities at Kyushu University*, https://catalog.lib.kyushu-u.ac.jp/opac_download_md/1806131/p057.pdf (accessed February 20, 2019).

[31] Ian Reader, "Secularisation, R.I.P.? Nonsense! The 'Rush Hour Away from the Gods' and the Decline of Religion in Contemporary Japan," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 1 (2012): 7-36.

[32] Reader, "Secularization, R.I.P.?," 34.

[33] Karl Löwith, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953). The first version appeared in English and dates from 1949.

the theology of secularization.[34] As for philosophy, Charles Taylor recently made a majestic contribution with *A Secular Age.*[35] In sociology, the most important texts on secularization date only from the second half of the 1960s. Since then, secularization has been one of the most hotly contested topics in sociology.

If one considers the pre-1960 discussion as a preliminary phase, we can distinguish four stages or phases in the sociological debate on secularization.[36] Each stage since 1960 is driven by an antithesis, opposed to the thesis in the previous stage, accompanied by a new thesis, which is supposed to be the new guiding principle of the research.

The Preparatory Phase (From the Nineteenth Century to 1960). Secularization as a concept and as the focus of a particular theory, i.e., secularization theory, did not break through in sociology until the 1960s. Of course, the debate over the decline, real or perceived, of Christianity began earlier. Great thinkers, such as Karl Marx, and the great classical sociologists, such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, wrote extensively about religion and its impact on modern society, although without using the term secularization or, as with Weber, without using it frequently and consistently.[37] Nevertheless, they all assumed a hefty decline of Christianity. Weber, as is well known, described modern society, which he saw as rationalized, as an *eisernes Gehäuse*, usually translated in English as an "iron cage."[38] Durkheim wrote: "Les anciens dieux vieillissent ou meurent, et d'autres ne sont pas nés" (The old gods grow old or die and others aren't born).[39] But neither Weber nor Durkheim developed a theory of secularization in these explicit terms. On the empirical side, the decline of Christianity was also chartered. For the Netherlands, this had already been done by Jacob Pieter Kruijt in his 1933 book *Ontkerkelijking* (Dechurching). The empirical figures were mainly collected by sociographers and sociologists affiliated with the major churches, sometimes in the context of purposefully established institutes (in France, Le Bras; in Germany, the Zentralstelle für Kirchliche Statistik; in the Netherlands, KASKI, among

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[34] See, especially, Friedrich Gogarten, *Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit. Die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk Verlag, 1953).

[35] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[36] Oliver Tschannen, *Les théories de la sécularisation* (Genève: Groz, 1992) still offers the best historical overview of the debate up to 1990.

[37] Anthony J. Carroll, *Protestant Modernity: Weber, Secularisation, and Protestantism* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2007).

[38] Max Weber, *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus,* in Idem, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Band I (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988[9]), 203.

[39] Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, Edition 1968), 610-611.

others).[40] Alarmed by the first signs of what was usually called de-Christianization or de-churching, they tried to map the churchly beliefs and practices as well as the causes of the decline. They, too, did not use the term secularization, or used it only sparingly, and their ecclesiastical stance defined their theories heavily.

Second Phase: The Breakthrough of Secularization Theory in Sociology (1960-1980). In the 1960s, no one in the West could deny the accelerated decline of the major churches any longer, and so sociologists finally began to work *en masse* on a theory of secularization *expressis verbis*. Four books by as many authors defined the new theory. In two years, 1966 and 1967, three standard works were published: *Religion in Secular Society* by Bryan Wilson, *The Sacred Canopy* by Peter Berger, and, albeit critical, *Invisible Religion* by Thomas Luckmann.[41] Ten years later, they were followed by David Martin's now classic book, *A General Theory of Secularization*.[42] In this new phase, the religious sociology of the church analysts of the previous phase was dismissed by sociologists as amateurish, non-theoretical, and biased by ecclesiastical interests – see, in particular, the scathing critique of Luckmann[43] and the transformation in the years 1960-1970 of the International Conference for the Society of Religion (ICSR) from a Catholic to a purely academic association.[44] Durkheim and Weber, on the other hand, were glorified and plundered in search of concepts and ideas that might be useful for the development of a structural theory of secularization (see the rise of the Weberian concepts of rationalization and disenchantment). With their help, the secularization sociologists sought to uncover the links between basic features of modern society – disenchantment, rationalization, socialization, pluralizetion, individualization, differentiation – and secularization. Secularization, their main thesis said, was the quasi-necessary consequence of advancing modernization,

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[40] For an overview, see Benjamin Ziemann, *Katholische Kirche und Sozialwissenschaften 1945-1975* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 27-151; for the Netherlands Chris Dols, *Fact Factory. Sociological Expertise and Episcopal Decision Making in the Netherlands 1946-1972* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2015), 33-77.

[41] Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: Watts, 1966); Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion. The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

[42] David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper, 1978).

[43] See also Thomas Luckmann, "Neuere Schriften zur Religionssoziologie," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 12, no. 2 (1960): 315-326.

[44] Emile Poulat, "La CISR de la fondation à la mutation: réflexions sur une trajectoire et ses enjeux," in *Sociology and Religions. An Ambiguous Relationship*, eds. Liliane Voyé and Jaak Billiet (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 57-78; Karel Dobbelaere, "CISR, an Alternative Approach to Sociology of Religion in Europe: ACSS and CISR Compared," in *Sociology and Religions. An Ambiguous Relationship*, eds. Liliane Voyé and Jaak Billiet (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 79-89.

though Luckmann rejected such a mechanistic conception and Martin had, by then and rightly so, already emphasized the many diverse pathways to secularization.

Third Phase: Criticism of Secularization Theory (1980-2015). Starting around 1980, the second phase version of secularization theory came under increasing criticism. The date is no coincidence. In 1979, Iran witnessed the fall of the Shah and the Islamic Revolution. The Islamist revival would expand and deepen in the following decades. At the same time, religion – in the form of Evangelicals, Pentecostal believers, and the New Christian Right – also seemed to be on the rise in the United States, with major implications for American politics. Elsewhere, too, in Israel, India, Africa, and large parts of Asia, religion proved to be not declining but strengthening. The new reality was translated into a critique of the secularization theory of the previous years, which posited a close, causal relationship between modernization and secularization. The new thesis stated that "the world is as ferociously religious as it was, and in some places even more so than ever."[45] Europe, with its ongoing secularization, lost its status as a model for the future and was now labeled by a number of sociologists of religion as the exception, as the secularizing exception in a religiously glowing world.[46] It was time, according to the new view, to desacralize secularization theory,[47] and to denounce the mythical nature of the theory. Criticism and rejection of secularization theory thus became the new taken-for-granted view, and the adherents of secularization theory were thrown back on the defensive.[48]

Fourth Phase: Revival of Secularization Theories, Also Outside the West (2015–). Despite the continuing fierce criticism, I would like to suggest that a new, fourth phase in the history of sociological secularization theory has begun, one in which the secularization theory enjoys a revival. It is difficult to give an exact year for the beginning of this new phase. In any case, the facts – the new facts – seem to be pointing in that direction. I briefly repeat. The rise of organized religion in Eastern Europe, where Christianity experienced a revival after the fall of communism, seems to be over in most countries. In the United States, new research shows that the number of nones, those who do not consider themselves as belonging to a religion, is increasing, especially among the younger generations. In Latin America, too, statistics show a beginning of a rise of the nones, again, especially among the young.

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[45] Berger, "The Desecularization of the World," 2.

[46] Berger, "The Desecularization of the World" and Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case.*

[47] Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory," *Social Forces* 65, no. 3 (1987): 587-611.

[48] See Detlef Pollack, "Historische Analyse statt Ideologiekritik. Eine historisch-kritische Diskussion über die Gültigkeit der Säkularisierungstheorie," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37, no. 4 (2011): 482-522; Steve Bruce, *Secularization. In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The latter means that even outside the West, the first signs of secularization can be recognized. If these indications become stronger – and I think they will – they will certainly give rise to new and renewed versions of secularization theories. In particular, the input of non-Western social scientists on secularization in non-Western countries will be very interesting.

However, the new versions will have to deal with some well-founded criticisms of past secularization theories. Several propositions and assumptions from the first phase of the sociological secularization debate must be rejected. For example, the privatization thesis that states that religion is only practiced behind the front door is clearly not true. Religion continues to manifest itself in the public forum and is sometimes decisive in political conflicts (see John Paul II and the fall of communism in Poland, or the influence of the churches on the democratization process in Latin America and the Philippines in the 1980s).[49] Second, the old secularization theories saw only decline, steady decline, and, consequently, grossly underestimated the religious revival movements in modern societies. It constituted, so to speak, their blind spot. We now better understand that modernity after 1800 witnessed many influential revivals, including in the West, in particular the Netherlands, Flanders, Ireland, many regions of Germany, the United States.[50] The resurgence of religion outside the West in recent decades is really no exception. Third, older secularization theories tended to view religion and the churches unilaterally as phenomena of the past that would remain largely unchanged and maladapted in modernity. This view, however, forgets that churches and religious movements process modernity no less than other organizations and movements do. Moreover, each movement and organization, each church and religious movement, processes modernity in its own way. As a result of that processing, the Catholic Church of the nineteenth century, despite the emphasis on its immutability at the time, can be seen as new and very different compared to its stature and form in the eighteenth century – and the same is true of the Catholic Church today compared to the period before 1960.[51] Finally, secularization is not proceeding rapidly, steadily, and broadly concurrent, as previously assumed, but slowly, with ups and downs and on divergent trajectories. This, too, was a mistake – albeit an understandable one – of the first generation of secularization theorists.

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[49] See Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*.

[50] Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Staf Hellemans, *Strijd om de moderniteit. Sociale bewegingen en verzuiling in Europa sinds 1800* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1990); Patrick Pasture, "The role of religion in social and labour history," in *Class and Other Identities: Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History*, eds. Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel Van der Linden (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2002), 101-132; Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, *World Christianities c.1815-c.1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[51] Staf Hellemans, "From 'Catholicism against modernity' to the problematic 'modernity of Catholicism'," *Ethical Perspectives* 8, no. 2 (2001): 117-127, and below, section 4.

In my opinion, secularization theory needs to be developed further in a modified form. Two things should certainly be taken to heart. As Martin argued for decades, secularization is not an automatically evolving process that would be the same everywhere.[52] No, each country – and even each region – follows its own trajectory, and sometimes that trajectory is one of little to no secularization or even de-secularization (see Israel as an example of the latter). Second, both the concept of secularization and the theory of secularization need to be reconsidered for application in the non-Western world. Both were developed with the Western world and Christianity in mind. But what does secularization mean in Japan? The concept of secularization and the theory of secularization should therefore be further developed using examples from the non-Western world. Religious differences must be taken into account as well. For instance, the polarization in the Islamic world between Islamists and secularists (as in Iran and Turkey) will certainly lead to different secularization trajectories than those in the Buddhist world of South Asia. The latest phase of secularization theory should not be seen as a return to, or a mere extension of, the second phase. It poses new and crucial challenges.

A Turbulent Religious Field and Its Partial Dissolution

My main thesis is that, as far as religion is concerned, we are nearing the end of an era, the end of the age of the dominance of a few world religions. Secularization, the decline of heavily organized religion – and world religions are all heavily organized – is one important facet of this decline. Two other developments are at least as important: first, the breakdown in most countries of religious monopolies and oligopolies and the concomitant rise of a pluralistic and turbulent religious field and, second, the partial disintegration and dissolution of that religious field. I will deal with the two trends together. Objectively speaking, it is a difficult topic because, at least for the moment, there is no conclusive way to define religion: the new religious field and quasi-religion outside the religious field are only just emerging and they are manifesting themselves only vaguely and invisibly – a problem already raised by Luckmann in 1967 in his book *Invisible Religion*.[53] Moreover, I have not studied the emergence of new religion and the dissolution of the religious field as deeply as is required. Thus, I will keep this section shorter.

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[52] Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* and Idem, *On Secularization. Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
[53] Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion.*

From a Monopoly and Oligopoly Church to a Turbulent Religious Field

Let me first address the transformation and pluralization of the religious field. Until the 1950s, the situation seemed clear and eternally frozen. In most Western countries, the vast majority of the population was affiliated, to a greater or lesser extent, with one church, which thus benefited from a quasi-monopoly on religion. This situation was considered normal, especially in the Catholic world. Smaller religious groups operated on the margins, were considered deviant and easily relegated to the sphere of psychopathology (see the then current view of conversion to those groups). Shortly after 1900, Weber and Troeltsch conceptualized this state of affairs, which had emerged from the Protestant and Catholic Reformations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in a church-sect typology: churches as large, influential social institutions in which members were born and socialized generation after generation; sects as small, religiously aristocratic groups to which people converted.[54] Given this favorable condition, it was not surprising that the main churches received almost all the attention in research and theology. This was also the case in the few countries with oligopolistic churches, with two main churches, as in Germany and Switzerland, or with three main churches, as in the Netherlands. The few more pluralistic countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, were considered exceptions, while migration countries. In Europe, since 1600-1650, the monopoly and oligopoly churches – Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox – were towering almost unrivaled above other religious groups.

Since 1960, this has changed dramatically in the West. With the exception of a few countries in Eastern Europe, such as Russia, where the state and the Orthodox Church are converging to keep out other churches and religions, there are almost no church monopolies and oligopolies left. In their place has come a pluralistic religious field, in which all kinds of religions, movements, and groups are emerging and crisscrossing each other. As a result of globalization and migration, all the major religions – Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism – have found niches in the former Christian monopoly areas where they can bloom. In addition, all kinds of new religious movements have emerged. Often, they are loosely affiliated with a major religion, such as Transcendental Meditation, Bhagwan, and many Western Buddhist movements and groups. A number of groups and movements are also related to Western history and pseudo-traditions, such as New Age, neo-paganism, Satanism, or holistic psychotherapy – keep in mind that these are umbrella terms for designating internally very diverging movements. Then there are Christian sects and movements imported from abroad, often from outside the West. They can hardly be counted anymore, and new ones are constantly popping up. It is important to note that every major religious tradition – from East to West – generates countless new religious groups. Competitive pluralization of a reli-

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[54] Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik*; Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1972[5]), 28-30, 692-693, 717-725.

gious tradition is not exclusive to Buddhism or Hinduism, New Age or Paganism. It occurs in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or Shinto as well.[55] The surge of pluralization after 1960 is closely linked to our time, late modernity. Repression and stigmatization toward all forms of novelty have greatly diminished – this is also true outside the religious realm. Increased prosperity and education and improved communication and transportation facilities have also made it much easier to found and join new groups. The pluralization of the religious field will therefore continue and probably increase even further – for the Netherlands, it is estimated that today there are about a thousand different religious groups, movements, and churches.

Less eye-catching, but in my opinion at least as central to the new religious field, is the relentless flow of new input into what is so beautifully called *la mouvance religieuse* in French. In English, we would speak of religiosity or spirituality. You can find all kinds of religious entrepreneurs and initiatives that are not comprehensively organized anymore: self-help coaches and ritual specialists who set up a new offer (such as the art project, *Allerzielen Alom* [All Souls All Around] in Amsterdam),[56] spiritual authors who write books that people can brood over;[57] there are bookstores and internet sites, practical philosophers (see Alain de Botton and his School of Life), wellness farms, festivals like Burning Man in the United States, fiction-based religion like Jediism (based on *Star Wars*) and Elven religion (based on *The Lord of the Rings*), etc.[58] These are far removed from what was described in classical sociology of religion as a church, denomination, or sect with members, or even as a new religious organization or a new religious movement. Rather, they can be referred to as hypes, loose rituals, dreamy places of worship, and many virtual spheres that offer individuals a temporary home. Because they are often poorly organized, these initiatives are also very fragile and often have a short life span.

Let us conclude with regard to the religious field. First, we have evolved from a religious condition with one to three hegemonic churches to a multicultural and varied religious field. Some speak of a religious market in which many religions, groups, and individual entrepreneurs compete for the scarce attention of the public.[59] I, myself, prefer the term religious field, so as not to privilege *a priori* one specific theoretical approach to analyze that field.

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[55] Christopher Partridge, ed., *Encyclopedia of New Religions. New Religious Movements, Sects and Alternative Spiritualities* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2004).

[56] See William Arfman, *Analysing Allerzielen Alom: Material Culture in an Emerging Rite* (Leiden: Sidestone Press 2011).

[57] See James Redfield, *The Celestine Promise* (New York: Warner Books, 1993) or Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1997).

[58] Markus A. Davidsen, *The spiritual Tolkien milieu: A study of fiction-based religion* (Leiden: Leiden Center for the Study of Religion, 2014).

[59] See the rational choice theory of Stark, Finke, and Iannaccone and in the Netherlands Erik Sengers, *"Al zijn wij katholiek, wij zijn Nederlanders." Opkomst en verval van de katholieke kerk in Nederland sinds 1795 vanuit rational-choice perspectief* (Delft: Eburon, 2003).

Second, the religious field, like everything else in society, is changing faster than ever before. There are many innovations going on in the religious field, and it is impossible to predict what will be on offer in a few years. Third, at the same time, the new religious field is less institutionalized than it used to be. Not only have the old main institutions declined, but none of the many newcomers in recent decades has achieved a stature that can match, let alone surpass, that of the old mainline churches. Ironically, despite all the losses, these old churches remain by far the largest organizations in the new religious field. Finally, while the war between the major Christian confessions after 1600 resulted in church monopolies and oligopolies, each in a national setting, even though, like the Catholics, they were part of a universal church, national boundaries have now lost much of their constituent power. As a result, the religious field increasingly operates internationally.[60] Innovations, trends, and fads now spread rapidly from one place to another.

The Partial Dissolution – or the De-differentiation – of the Religious Field

The position of the major churches is not only determined by the loss of their monopoly and oligopoly position and the fact that they now become players amidst other players in a pluralistic and turbulent religious field. Furthermore, the religious field itself seems to be in a state of dissolution and partial disintegration.

The tendency toward dissolution is, in fact, a reversal of the very long-standing tendency toward differentiation of religion. Differentiation theories have a long history in sociology. The first versions were proposed as early as the second half of the nineteenth century by Durkheim and Spencer. Over time, the theories became more complex. In this regard, I follow the German systems theorist, Niklas Luhmann.[61] Differentiation means that specific field organizations and groups arise, such as companies in the economy or schools in education. These specialized collectivities are connected to each other according to specific field logics – e.g., the economic logics between businesses or the aesthetic logics in the world of the arts – and they will consider other fields and activities as outside of them. After 1500, and especially after 1800, more and more fields became more differentiated: the polity, the economy, the family system, science, education, the arts, health care, sports, the media, etc. Structural or functional differentiation – the emergence and interlocking of multiple fields, each with its specifically differentiated collectivities and field logics – constitutes a basic feature of modern society.

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[60] José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," in *Religion: Beyond the Concept*, ed. Hent De Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 101-119; Patrick Pasture, "Religious Globalisation in Post-War Europe. Spiritual Connections and Interactions," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 51 (2011): 63-108.

[61] Luhmann, "Die Ausdifferenzierung der Religion," and Idem, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997).

Now to religion. Like any field, religion has a distinctive history of differentiation. It was one of the first fields to crystallize, long before 1500. Christianity, for example, organized itself as a church with priests as specialists, i.e., the church distinguished itself from the political elites and set itself up with separate, religious norms, procedures, and personnel. The Gregorian reform in the eleventh century, followed by the flowering of canon law, further reinforced this differentiation. This gave the Church considerable power and influence in a world without much functional differentiation. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the differentiation between religion and society deepened further, especially thanks to the separation of church and state. Because the differentiation after 1800 was mainly driven by other fields, and because these fields and their organizations claimed their own independence, often against the churches, these differentiation processes were perceived as undesirable by the churches, especially by the Catholic Church, which considered it as the threat of secularization. But at the same time, this multifaceted evolution toward differentiation made the religious field itself more recognizable as a field, distinct from other fields, focused on the relationship between immanence and transcendence, endowed with religion-specific organizations, roles, rituals, and buildings. Moreover, globalization gave the differentiation sharper contours beyond the West and generated a global field of religions and religiosity.[62] In recent decades, however, a series of fundamental changes in the religious field have led to a fading of its contours – for the time being, only in the West. The religious field is, slowly, decomposing. I see two main reasons for this de-differentiation trend: the de-institutionalization within the religious field itself and the combination of a religionization of religion on the one hand, and the organization of quasi-religious activities outside the religious field on the other.

First, there are the internal tendencies toward de-differentiation. After centuries of increasing differentiation of religion as religion, the identity of the religious field is becoming fuzzier in the present day. The notion that a field or domain is perceived as distinct from others is closely related to the presence of field-specific institutions. For example, in the polity, political parties, parliament, government, ministries with their paid officials, and political elections are the beacons through which we perceive a political system. For the economy, these are firms, people perceived as consumers, and the market as a distribution mechanism. For religion, the recognizability of the religious field is ensured by religious institutions, religious specialists, religious writings and views, church buildings, specific religious practices such as church rituals, praying to God, etc. The religionization of religion – the redeployment of religion within its core domain through focusing on the relationship between immanence and transcendence (expressed, among other things, in the separation of church and state, of religion and science, of religion and school education) – defined, as mentioned, the differentiation of religion even more clearly than before 1800. That changed, however, after

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[62] Beyer, *Religion in Global Society.*

1960. Differentiation and the perception of religion as religion were initially generated by the major institutionalized religions. But these are now losing ground, so that religion as a field is now beginning to be perceived less clearly. Moreover, the new, much smaller religious movements and especially the indefinable *mouvance religieuse* generate ambiguity: what is religion here and what is only relaxation, psychotherapy, excitement, a sense of calm? Hence, we see the recent – and endless – debates about what religion is, in science, in cafes, and even in the courtroom in the case of Scientology. The discussion is irresolvable because religion as a field is becoming fuzzier, because it has become, in the words of Meerten ter Borg, "a frayed eternity."[63]

The dissolution of the religious field, however, goes beyond the waning perception and identification of an observable field. It is also driven by the rise of a new kind of quasi-religion that is emerging outside the major religions and outside the religious field. Let me explain. A cause of strength for the major institutionalized religions until 1960 was their ability to connect with all areas of life, including what we now consider nonreligious. Religion was considered so fundamental that, at least in the eyes of those who took religion seriously, it had to guide or at least orient daily life, politics, education, family life, science, etc. A powerful organization and the number and quality of religious specialists made possible this active connection between church and world, as it was called in Catholicism. In the heyday of pillarization (1880-1960), this associate relationship between church and pillarized political party, trade union, university, education, leisure association, etc. was still present and highly visible. This is now completely over. The main churches are no longer able to guide and orient non-church organizations. Even safeguarding and maintaining the Christian character of Catholic and Protestant schools has often become intractable. The declining ability to provide direction to the outside world from within a religion is accompanied by a religionization of religion, the tendency to focus increasingly on the core domain of religion itself, on celebrations, sacraments, and the personal relationship with transcendence. Surely, social outreach initiatives and other religious activities in nonreligious fields, or political mobilization from religious motives do still occur. But they now tend to flow unilaterally from the religious logic of a committed individual and less from the combined institutional logics of two organizations spanning religious and nonreligious domains, as was the case, for example, with the Catholic labor movement before 1960.

It could be said that the declining ecclesial capacity to control the outside world and the trend toward religionization have further sharpened the distinction between religion and the other domains. But that is only one side of the story. Simultaneously with the retreat of institutionalized religion, the gates have opened to a reverse trend: seemingly nonreligious activities and groups are now becoming bearers of religious or quasi-religious content. Instead of

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[63] Meerten ter Borg, *Een uitgewaaierde eeuwigheid. Het menselijk tekort in de moderne cultuur* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1991).

churches, controlling and directing extra-religious activities, many nonreligious activities are taking on religious and quasi-religious dimensions. Psychotherapy and health care have become more open to the spiritual dimension of health and well-being, leading to questions about the value of church-based spiritual care. Or consider Mindfulness, originating in Buddhism, and this being undecidable – and irrelevant too – as to whether one wants to qualify it as religious or nonreligious. Music festivals are so popular because they may engender quasi-religious experiences, such as trance and a temporary time-out from daily life (see already the Woodstock festival in 1969 and rave culture[64]). Sometimes mixtures of religion and music and art are deliberately built in, as with the Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert.[65] The so-called wellness farms are another example of how seemingly non-religious activities can be linked to religion. I, myself, experienced – though I do not know if this is representative – when visiting a wellness resort with my wife how it was decorated with images from Eastern religions. Deep rest via wellness is associated here with religious detachment and inner peace. It is also no coincidence that in the field of economics and marketing, some thought is nowadays spent on studying and promoting an experience economy.[66]

Conclusion

The decline of the main, institutionalized religions and the emergence of a variety of poorly organized movements and activities of an indistinct alloy within the religious field are making religion less recognizable as religion. Moreover, this tendency is reinforced by a growing range of activities with religious and quasi-religious connotations outside the religious field proper. Religion, like a number of other fields, may have developed, that is, differentiated, into an identifiable religious field over the past few centuries. After 1960, the trend is going in the opposite direction, that of de-differentiation, of dissolution of the religious field. Again, the dissolution does not imply that religion, understood as the connection of immanent life with transcendence, including High Transcendence, will disappear. It does imply, however, that people will seek to develop these kinds of connections more often through activities that are no longer cast as religion, let alone church.

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[64] Graham St John, *Rave Culture and Religion* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004).

[65] François Gauthier, "The Enchantments of Consumer Capitalism: Beyond Belief at the Burning Man Festival," in *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets*, eds. François Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 143-158.

[66] B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).

I interpret the transformation into a turbulent religious field and the rise of quasi-religion outside the religious field, alongside secularization, as important indications that the age of world religions is coming to an end. This is why I am reluctant to call the new era, which is now looming on the horizon, a new axial age, as Yves Lambert proposes.[67] After all, the current great transformation is not leading to new axial religions, let alone to new, domineering world religions, as was the case in and after the axial age. Yet Lambert, with Thomas Luckmann,[68] was one of the few sociologists who envisioned a fundamentally new era, one no longer attuned to world religions, being more or less adapted to modernity.

A Smaller and New Catholic Church

I have attempted to substantiate the thesis that the age of world religions is nearing its end as a result of secularization, the decline of organized religion, and the emergence of new religions within and of quasi-religious offers outside the religious field in forms very different from those of the major, heavily institutionalized religions that have prevailed for the past two thousand years. If this is true, the following questions arise: What does the end of the age of world religions mean for the future of existing organized religions? More specifically, what does it mean for the main churches and the small churches? What new forms will they take? How will they respond to the new situation? What will be their new place? Lacking space in this paper and the knowledge to address other churches, I will look only at the Catholic Church – and only at the larger framework. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that the analytical framework proposed here, with modifications of course, is, in my opinion, no less applicable to other large and small churches.

Deteriorating Conditions

If the preceding analysis holds water, it means that the conditions in which the Catholic Church – and other churches – must operate in our time and in the future have become much more unfavorable than they were in the past. Four bundles of deteriorating conditions stand out.

First, as a result of pluralization, the Catholic Church is now in stiff competition with many other providers of religion, both within and outside the religious field. I have already discussed this in detail in the previous section.

Second, the Catholic Church is in the midst of an institutional crisis. At a first level, there is the growing shortage of priests and religious, the workhorses of the Catholic Church. Without them, most of the groundwork is in

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[67] Yves Lambert, "Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age: Secularization or New Religious Forms?," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 303-333.

[68] Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*.

danger of grinding to a halt. More generally, the basic functioning of the Church as an organization, the relationship between hierarchy and church people, is being questioned. One no longer knows how this relationship can be legitimately and efficiently shaped. It points to an even deeper problem, namely, the decoupling of religion and institutionalization.[69] In contrast to the Protestant churches, the Catholic Church has always emphasized the sacred nature of the Church as an institution and has thus continued to expand its church organization since the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. Today, the identification of church and institution building and the concomitant sacralization of church organization are colliding with people's widespread feelings of suspicion toward major institutions.[70] While this distrust affects all large organizations and institutions, including government and firms, it affects the Catholic Church, as a religious and moral organization, even more. People are now more dismissive of formal moral guidance, especially when it comes from organizational elites. Moreover, the Catholic Church seems to be at odds with the moral sensibilities of the population. In areas where the majority of the population has become more liberal – such as contraception, sex, or remarriage – it takes a stern stance, while in areas where the population has become more morally demanding – such as transparency in governance and abuse of power – it is slow to respond. In essence, however, the question of institutional trust in the Church is not something that can be restored by good policy. What is crucial here is that heavy institutionalization is no longer necessary in late modernity. There is a tendency in our society toward organization light and toward conditional and abrogative commitment. This tendency can also be observed in many other areas, for example in politics. In the religious sphere, it manifests itself, among other things, in a deep institutional crisis of the Catholic Church. It is a crisis that cannot be easily resolved.

The third factor that is troubling the Catholic Church – and the other churches – is the loss of capacity to organize society and the everyday world of its followers. I have already discussed this when treating the dissolution of the religious field. On the one hand, religious motives and activities are finding shelter in fields that are considered nonreligious – I referred to music festivals and the wide and growing range of psychotherapy, wellness, and leisure activities, among others. On the other hand, churches and denominations are less able than before to organize and influence the world outside them. The leading position of world religions in premodern societies resulted

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[69] See Helmut Schelsky, "Ist die Dauerreflexion institutionalisierbar? Zum Thema einer modernen Religionssoziologie," in Idem, *Auf der Suche nach Wirklichkeit. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Düsseldorf-Köln: Eugen Diederichs, 1965), 250-275.

[70] Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, "The Church as a Religious Organization," *Concilium* 10, no. 1 (1974): 70-82; Karl Gabriel, "Die neuzeitliche Gesellschaftsentwicklung und der Katholizismus als Sozialform der Christentumsgeschichte," in *Zur Soziologie des Katholizismus*, eds. Karl Gabriel and Franz-Xaver Kaufmann (Mainz: Grünewald Verlag, 1980), 201-225.

from the relationships they managed to establish between the core religious domain and numerous other domains in society: religious institutions also provided scholars, civil servants (see the etymology of the term "clerk"), teaching staff; they legitimized political authority, and they commissioned artists. After 1800, when the boundaries between different areas were drawn more sharply through functional differentiation, Catholicism remained a master at establishing close connections. The separation between church and state was countered by a Catholic party, the separation between science and religion by all kinds of Catholic scientific associations and Catholic universities; Catholic hospitals and schools were established, Catholic workers' and farmers' unions were founded, Catholic leisure associations arose, and so on. A widespread network of Catholic organizations developed around the Catholic Church. After 1960, this collapsed and it was not replaced. An extensive Catholic world that surrounds and guides the faithful no longer exists. Of course, religion still strives to permeate all of life, but it no longer does so through the channel of a network of Catholic organizations and associations that direct the Catholic laity. It has now become a responsibility of individuals who want to take their faith seriously. It is clear that the loss of the Church's capacity to organize society entails a terrible loss of relevance: one no longer relies on the Church for one's engagement in politics, education, welfare, leisure, the choice of a spouse, etc.

Fourth, there is the increasing inability of heavily organized religions to convey religion – the sensibility to and handling of high transcendence – to most people. Many people no longer understand what religion is about. This is because the cognitive framework on which the worldviews of most churches, including the Catholic Church, have rested for so long has lost much of its plausibility: the literal interpretation of Bible passages, a God who intervenes in the natural world (e.g., the weather), the idea that heaven, purgatory, or hell awaits as a direct reward or punishment of one's earthly life, and so on. As a result of this loss of plausibility, God, in the eyes of many, no longer seems to have power over one's life. For the average person, the weakening of literal interpretations and the emphasis on symbolic understandings has in fact raised the threshold for entering the religious realm – this is usually overlooked. Religion has become a complex personal quest with few fixed anchors and with a goal – abiding in God's grace – that is difficult to achieve, even in incipient form. For practitioners, religion has become demanding and therefore elitist, in the sense of having a talent for religion combined with favorable circumstances. Consequently, many people today have a hard time understanding why anyone would put so much time and energy into something like religion. The evolution toward a more abstract religion – which one finds especially among liberal religionists – can be compared to the incomprehension and alienation that contemporary artists often experience on the part of the public, namely, the failure to understand, in all sincerity, the meaning of this kind of activity.

Of course, there are not only deteriorating circumstances. There are also positive opportunities for churches in late modernity. As has been said several

times, the core promise of religion, to come closer to the fullness of life by connecting one's personal life to High Transcendence, has not lost its appeal. Second, and most important, reliance on religious specialization (a tradition, organization, repertoire, buildings, experienced specialists) makes it possible to get much further in one's religious journey than is possible alone. Religious institutions, both large and small churches, have specific advantages – a more systematic and more reflexive handling of the Holy – that cannot be provided by mere individual experiences of the Holy that one gains because these experiences are usually superficial and haphazard, except in the case of religiously gifted persons. Martin emphasized this point in one of his last articles when he spoke of churches as "signposts to transcendence."[71] Third, the Catholic Church has the advantage of being a global church with a long tradition. In our time of uncertainty and rapid change, this has many advantages. Decline in some regions can be offset by vitality in others. Global presence and prominence provide opportunities for contacts with interested parties. The higher church hierarchy more easily receives national and international media attention. The extensive repertoire opens up many entry points for possible personal involvement: inspiring papal documents, beautiful old churches, pilgrimages (e.g., Santiago de Compostela), the history of religious painting and music, etc. Certainly, late modernity also offers positive opportunities for heavily organized religion.

As always in history, there are positive opportunities alongside deteriorating circumstances. But when we consider all the circumstances, we must conclude that the conditions in which small and large churches must operate in late modernity have generally deteriorated – hence the decline of the churches in the West. Nevertheless, circumstances are only circumstances. They constitute starting points for processing by people and churches. Therefore, let us now take a closer look at this processing and at the emergence of a new Catholic Church in the late modern era as the result of this process.

Choice Catholicism in Late Modernity

Often, religion and churches are placed outside of modernity. Religion and churches are said to be premodern. They are seen as fundamentally out of place in the new conditions of modern society and therefore doomed to become marginal. This is simplistic reasoning. Their very existence means that they are part of modernity because they are bound to processing that society no more and no less than individuals and other institutions are. A church and its members interpret their own time with the dispositions and ideals circulating at the time. They are incessantly seeking favorable opportu-

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[71] David Martin, "Pointing to Transcendence. Reflections from an Anglican Context," in *Modernity and Transcendence. A Dialogue with Charles Taylor*, eds. Anthony J. Carroll and Staf Hellemans (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 8-34.

nities and they are always working to avert threats they perceive. They undertake activities in response to the circumstances in which they find themselves. They do this at any time and in any place, and thus a new church with new ways of believing is always emerging. There is always a close relationship – chains of interaction – between church and contemporary society. This was so before modernity and it is so in modernity. Since the 1980s, this analytical perspective has been the starting point of my research.[72] It is inspired by the German sociologists Franz-Xaver Kaufmann and Karl Gabriel.[73] Because a church processes its own time and environment through its members, the process of processing occurs in multiple and diverse ways. Hence, in modernity, it is not only modernists or liberals that are standing in tune with their time. Choosing an oppositional mode should also be seen as taking a stance in the midst of modernity, or choosing a middle of the road position, or a left-wing revolutionary commitment – all are examples of a possible processing of modernity. Intra-church pluralism is inevitable, and it is constantly reconstituted with every change of circumstances and environment.

It is precisely because the Catholic Church has no choice but to process its environment, in this case late modernity, that we encounter important developments and features of late modernity in today's Catholic Church – always in processed form.[74] For example, the tendency toward globalization is present in the new composition of the College of Cardinals and in the choice of popes. Contemporary event culture has been translated in the Church in the form of World Youth Days. The progressive individualization after 1960 is visible in the fact that saying that a person is born into the Church no longer holds true, since each person now must choose a religion individually and often refrains from choosing one. Because this last characteristic seems so crucial to me, I have coined the term "choice Catholicism" to refer to post-1960 Catholicism as a whole. The process of delocalization manifests itself in the crisis of local parishes. Despite its authoritarian structure, democratization has crept into the Church in the form of an extensive consultative structure. Pluralism within the Church, like pluralism in society, has increased (for example, the many theologies taught at universities). Multiple religious belongings, syncretism, and the so-called seekers are widespread,

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[72] Hellemans, *Strijd om de moderniteit*; Idem, *Religieuze modernisering* (Utrecht: Inaugural lecture, 1997); in more elaborated form, see Hellemans and Rouwhorst, *The Making of Christianities in History.*

[73] Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Kirche begreifen. Analysen und Thesen zur gesellschaftlichen Verfassung des Christentums* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1979); Idem, *Kirche in der ambivalenten Moderne* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012); Karl Gabriel, *Christentum zwischen Tradition und Postmoderne* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1992); Karl Gabriel and Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Zur Soziologie des Katholismus* (Mainz: Grünewald Verlag, 1980).

[74] Hellemans, "From 'Catholicism against modernity'"; Idem, "Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West," in *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity*, eds. Staf Hellemans and Josef Wissink (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 24-37.

much to the regret of many in the church hierarchy. I could go on. So, the Catholic Church, like everything and everyone, changes with its time and its environment because it processes that time and that environment. As a result, the new era after 1960 results in a new church, in a new Catholicism, in what I call choice Catholicism.

In the past, the Catholic Church and people also processed their time and their environment, and they did so from the ideals, dispositions, and circumstances of their time. That is why the Catholicisms of the past are so different from today's choice Catholicism. With some caution, I think one can distinguish social formations, periods in history with similar circumstances and roughly the same structural effects of processing those circumstances. For example, historians in Europe distinguish the early modern period (from the sixteenth century to the French Revolution), the first modernity (from the French Revolution to 1960), and the second or late modernity (the years after 1960). I propose distinguishing, parallel to these social formations, what I will call church formations. A church formation represents its social formation, i.e., a church and its constituency process that social formation into a fitting church formation. The early modern era in Europe corresponded with an early modern Catholicism that strongly prioritized the unity of church and state – and the king – but, at the same time, further stylized itself into a semi-autonomous organization (think of the residence and supervision of bishops and of the better formation of the clergy in seminaries). The breakthrough of the first modernity after 1789 forced the Catholic Church to reinvent itself in the nineteenth century. It did so in the form of what I call ultramontane mass Catholicism. This was ultramontane because, for the first time in history, the entire world church was now firmly led from Rome, with bishops appointed solely by Rome and priests, in turn, appointed back and forth by the local bishop. Mass Catholicism for the following became more deeply socialized in the Church and more strongly mobilized than ever before in all kinds of church-led mass demonstrations and organizations. In the Netherlands and Belgium, it was the time of pillarization and of what is called *het rijke Roomsche leven* (the rich Roman life). The shift to a new formation of society after 1960, to a second modernity that functions very differently – think of the changed relationships in family and gender, greater individualization, de-pillarization – means that ultramontane mass Catholicism as a form of Catholicism was also no longer working. The Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965 was an expression of this growing uneasiness with, and disengagement from, the old pre-1960 church formation. It was also an attempt to create a new church formation, one that would be fully in accordance with the late modern era. However, this did not go as smoothly as expected; hence the great disappointment in the years following the Council. But the intuition was right. With the emergence of a second modernity, a new church was generated. A church cannot be deliberately sculpted by a church leadership in a council meeting. It arises in plural and is full of inner contradictions, from the many processing processes within the new modernity carried out by all the members of the church, by all the half-members, and by the reaction

of the non-members as well. It is often – and wrongly – assumed that shrinking organizations do not change. The evolution of the Catholic Church after 1960 proves otherwise.

Thus, by trial and error, a new Catholicism – choice Catholicism – is generated and, with it, a whole series of new issues and problems arise. People in the Church like to present these as new challenges: the revitalization of parishes, the reform of the curia, how to deal with the shortage of priests and religious, the new evangelization, the catholicity of Catholic schools and health care institutions, dealing with seekers, etc. By far, the most important challenge, and one that I think is being overlooked, seems to me to be the creation of a new offer. I will explain this briefly.[75] It relates to the last two of the four deteriorating conditions I identified above, the declining religious relevance of religion for people. How can people nowadays be made sensitive to the religious message, expressed in Christian terms, to the grace of God? In the Catholic Church, there is still a tendency to assume that its relevance should be self-evident, and that people just need to open up more to the Church's message. Its relevance will not increase in this way. In my opinion, the Church should invest more in creating and propagating an attractive offer. By offer, I mean practices, pathways, roles, and services that a church offers as many opportunities for religious commitment – concretely, these include celebrations, sacraments, prayers, events, associations, etc. The offer proposed by a church amounts to a translation into practices of its conception of the Holy and of the religious tradition it is part of. The offer is thus constitutive for a religious group. If the offer is not picked up by people, the group ceases to exist. In the past, a rich religious offer embraced by many had always been a source of pride for the Catholic Church: daily and weekly Masses, veneration of saints and Mary, processions and pilgrimages, lavishly celebrated church holidays, daily prayer, etc. After 1960, new offers have been added, such as spiritual centers, new church movements or the World Youth Days. But all in all, the offer has been scaled back, especially at the parish level. Working to expand the offer – inventing new and renewing old offers, publicizing them, welcoming newcomers – is thus a prime necessity. This cannot be left solely to the responsibility of individuals or parishes. If it is to be effective, diocesan, national, and even international action must be initiated, with ramifications downward. It requires cooperation from all walks of life, not hierarchical instructions or doctrinal rectitude. Above all, it requires a new attitude, a searching and humble attitude aimed at updating – representing – the Catholic tradition and message in today's society. If the Catholic Church does not meet this challenge, it will languish and end in insignificance.

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[75] See more in Staf Hellemans, "Will the Catholic Church Remain Relevant? The Evolution of its Offer after 1800," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, eds. Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), 41-71.

A second problem, which I also want to touch on briefly, concerns the increasing internal pluralism in the Church. Intra-church pluralism has always been there. Before 1800, it was often territorial in nature – and thus harmlessly tucked away in those segmented territories. As mentioned, compared to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intra-church pluralism increased after 1960. Moreover, the church hierarchy is no longer able to close discussions with a compelling final decision. *Roma locuta* (Rome has spoken) no longer means *causa finita* (end of the matter, i.e., the discussion). Expanding the offer also implies accepting that most people who respond to an offer will do so only partially and in syncretistic ways. Moreover, it presupposes a church that is not paralyzed by that pluralism but knows how to use the pluralism positively to generate a differentiated and rich offer.[76] This is all dauntingly difficult, highly controversial, and still a long way off. I must admit that I have always been somewhat amazed at the self-assurance with which both conservatives and liberals – to use those terms – oppose each other. Any church that wants to be a mainline church in the future, i.e., more than a small sect, will have to learn to deal with internal pluralism in a positive way. A one-sided policy toward either outspoken liberalism or pure conservatism will meet with a negative outcome in either case, as Dutch Catholicism has proven in recent decades.

The Great Transformation of the Catholic Church

The last point I would like to raise addresses directly the second main thesis of this paper: the great transformation of the Catholic Church. Speaking of a great transformation only makes sense if it goes beyond discussing the ongoing changes that the Church undergoes at every moment and by every person through the creative processing of the incessantly changing environment – what is normatively expressed in Christianity in the saying *ecclesia semper reformanda*. The great transformation also goes beyond determining transitions from one church formation to another, for example, from early modern Catholicism to ultramontane mass Catholicism. Speaking of a great transformation implies changes in characteristics and trends that have been going on for many centuries. It requires a reversal of tendencies that sometimes go back to the early days of Christianity. I believe that we are now experiencing the beginning of such a great transformation of the Catholic Church. Let me give some indications.

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[76] See Peter Jonkers, "Serving the World through Wisdom. Revitalizing Wisdom Traditions in Christian Faith," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, 73-105; Paul D. Murray, "Living Catholicity Differently. On Growing into the Plenitudinous Plurality of Catholic Communion in God," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, 109-158; Nicholas M. Healy, "New Theological Practices for the Contemporary Church," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, 201-227.

- First, there is the far-reaching decline of all the main churches. They are becoming small churches. This has not happened in Europe since the first centuries CE. Moreover, the smallest churches must fear for their survival. We live in the West in a secular age – and this is a novelty in world history.[77]

- In this context, a trend can be observed toward a retreat of the churches to their core religious domain, or what I call the religionization of religion. This, too, is unprecedented. The great religious traditions derived their great social significance precisely from their ability to organize and orient all walks of society. This, if my analysis is correct, seems to be over for good in the future.

- At the organizational level, a long period of cumulative expansion of a heavy church organization is coming to an end. The organizational expansion began in the high and late Roman period. It was resumed with the Gregorian reform in the eleventh century and further elaborated in the centuries that followed. In Catholicism, the expansion of church organization continued with and after the Council of Trent. It culminated in ultramontane mass Catholicism. That period of about 1,000 years is now coming to an end as well.

- On an individual and interactive level, the relationship between the following and the church institution and hierarchy has also changed profoundly. In Catholicism, the almost total control of the laity by the clergy was a cherished ideal for centuries, expressed, among other ways, by a fondness for the metaphor of the shepherd herding his sheep. The laity, however, can no longer be considered sheep. They can no longer be portrayed as followers who are guided by clergy and hierarchy. They sometimes make very idiosyncratic choices from the offers of the Church. The church constituency has been transformed into a recalcitrant public where syncretism is considered normal – hence the great attention to seekers and, recently, also to nones.[78]

These are all fundamental changes that go far beyond continuous incremental changes or transitions from one church formation to another. They question the very model of religion and church as we have known it for centuries in Catholicism. Those who refer to the Reformation or to the French Revolution to argue that in the near future, as in the past, the Catholic Church will largely recover from its present plight are denying the great transformation of religion and church and the great challenges and difficulties facing the Catholic Church – and, again, all churches large and small. We have arrived in uncharted territory.

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[77] Taylor, *A Secular Age.*

[78] See Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers, eds., *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015).

To Conclude

Let me recapitulate. We are at the beginning of a long and very profound transitional phase. In the West, especially in Western Europe, the end of the age of world religions is already visible. The main churches are becoming smaller minority churches without new large religious organizations emerging. The religious field is not only shrinking, but it is also splintering and fraying. Moreover, religion is no longer generated and experienced only within the religious field – as explicitly dealing with high transcendence. Aspects of religion can now also be encountered outside the religious field in an implicit, quasi-religious way. Thus, a whole new scene, related to new conditions, is emerging. In the long run, this is likely to manifest itself outside the West as well – in non-Western ways. In essence, the new phase in religious history no longer consists of a few world religions growing and flourishing and continuing over time, with minor changes in the design of those religious traditions over time. Rather, the new phase is characterized by a smaller, turbulent religious field in which old and new branches of world religions compete with each other and with many, small, highly diverse, and shaky new religious forms. Outside the religious field proper, the new phase will be characterized by a major quasi-religious offer that is no longer, as was often the case in the past, driven by the world religions. Indeed, it amounts to a great transformation of religion.

Heavy religious institutions, such as the existing main and small churches and sects, will not necessarily disappear. But it will be up to those institutions to prove their value to an audience that will not be easy to convince and may effortlessly choose absence. It promises to be a demanding predicament. It is likely that many religious institutions will not succeed – and, as always, the small ones are the most vulnerable. But even the big institutions – like the Catholic Church – will not remain above the fray.

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Part II

**West-European and American Perspectives on
the Beliefs of Nonbelievers**

Reflections on Noreligion and Nonbelief in Europe: Typology or Spectrum

GRACE DAVIE

This chapter offers a variety of reflections on the growing presence of noreligion and nonbelief in Europe seen from a sociological perspective. Central to the discussion are the conceptual tools deployed in this field, recognizing from the outset the complexity of the debate – all too often, this tips into an ideological rather than social scientific discussion. A second point follows from this: that is the need to think comparatively. Noreligion and non-belief – just like religion and belief – vary from place to place and can only be understood in terms of the contexts from which they emerge. Put differently, both the form and content of the debates surrounding religion that take place in the nation-states of Europe are determined by the historical trajectories that lie behind them. French *laïcité*, for example, is non-transferable, to the extent that no equivalent term exists in most – if not quite all – European languages.[1]

The first part of this chapter looks in some detail at the concepts introduced in the narrative, including those set out in the title: noreligion and nonbelief on the one hand, and typology and spectrum on the other. At the same time, it interrogates the notion of the secular itself. It concludes with a short excursus on the two ideas that framed much of my early work in the sociology of religion: "believing without belonging" and "vicarious religion" and their interconnections with noreligion and nonbelief. The second section introduces a range of European cases which illustrate the conceptual work: the first set is taken from West Europe; the second set from former communist countries. A global postscript brings the comparative discussion to a close. At the same time, it sets the European cases in a wider perspective, and in so doing reveals an additional qualification. The possibility of moving in or out of a faith community as a consequence of personal choice is very largely taken for granted in Europe; that is not the case elsewhere. Extrapolation from the European case must, it follows, be undertaken with care. The briefest of conclusions draw the threads together, arguing that it is more realistic to talk about these differences in terms of a spectrum – or series of spectra – than a typology.

Thinking Conceptually

Discussions about noreligion and nonbelief are inextricably linked to debates about secularization. As societies become more secular, more people

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[1] *Laïcité* combines two ideas: the freedom to believe or not to believe, alongside the absence of religion in the public sphere, which is strictly enforced. Both are important.

are likely to move away from religious attachments, whether of practice or belief, and vice versa. In what follows, noreligion is used to imply a stepping back from the institutions that represent religion in any given society; nonbelief will denote a rejection of the beliefs associated with these organizations, recognizing that the links between the two ideas are complex and that their usage in the literature is inconsistent. In either case, the process of disengagement can be gradual and uncontentious, taking place bit by bit as one generation replaces another. But even in Europe, the same shifts can be sudden and at times painful, both for the individuals concerned and for the communities of which they are part. Hence the need to take care with the terminology, and in particular to note whether the terms deployed are being used descriptively or normatively.

Take, for example, the word secular and its various cognates. At one level, secular is used as an adjective to describe a condition or situation; its meaning however can easily slip. The notion of a secular state can be used both to describe what exists or to promote what is desired. Secularization is quite different: it is a process, which takes place differently in different societies and encompasses a multiplicity of factors not all of which move in the same direction. Societies that demonstrate a marked decline in religious activity over a given period of time may or may not see concomitant growth in secular institutions; the reverse is equally true. Secularity is less frequently used in popular parlance but denotes a state of affairs that is described as secular, and is, by and large, a neutral term. Secularism in contrast is an ideology and implies a commitment – to the process of secularization, for instance, or to the affirmation of the secular in this or that sphere of society, not least the state.

Attention to these terms and the ways in which they are used tells us much about expectations with regard to noreligion and nonbelief. Is it to be encouraged or resisted, and by whom? A revealing example can be found in Linda Woodhead's widely read work on no religion in Britain in the second decade of the twenty-first century.[2] Woodhead – like me – sees the rise of noreligion primarily as a conscious disaffiliation from organized religious groups. The constituency in question has grown rapidly in recent years largely at the expense of the Christian churches. Generational changes are particularly marked – so much so that the nones now constitute a new cultural majority, a situation which is likely to endure. It is not true, however, that the nones are straightforwardly secular in terms of belief: only a minority are convinced atheists; the maybes, doubters, and don't-knows are just as present, "plus 5.5 per cent who definitely believe in God." In short – and the language is significant – "the nones are *not* (my italics) the phalanx of doughty secularists which some versions of secularisation theory expected, but they are

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[2] Linda Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain: the emergence of a new cultural majority," *Journal of the British Academy* 4 (2016): 245-261, https:/doi.org/ 10.85871/jba/004.245.

certainly more sceptical about the existence of God than those who identify as religious – and that scepticism is growing with each generation."[3]

In a short online piece written for the BBC, Woodhead describes the current panorama as follows:

> In Britain today, confident atheists and confident theists remain minorities in society. They may be the most vocal, but they're outnumbered by people who are agnostic, or keep an open mind, or believe in unseen forces and powers, or God and gods – or who just think it likely that there's "something more out there."[4]

In other words, a spectrum emerges: at one end are committed believers (some Christian and some from other faiths) and at the other are the convinced atheists. In between can be found every imaginable shade of grey in the various and flexible combinations of belief and nonbelief present among British people. The term spectrum is used advisedly, both here and later in the chapter, in order to capture the many and varied shades of belief and nonbelief (and indeed of belonging and non-belonging), rather than the discrete and clearly identified types implied by the term typology.

Lois Lee introduces a different point.[5] She too recognizes that nonbelief can be as varied as belief and to be properly understood it requires equally thorough scrutiny. Lee's work, however, has a particular focus in that she examines the difference between absence and presence in the understanding of the secular. Specifically, she notes a discernible shift from what she calls the hollowly secular (an absence) to the substantively nonreligious (a presence). Noreligion or nonbelief is no longer seen simply as the absence or loss of something (religious practice and/or religious belief) but becomes instead an attitude or belief that is actively expressed, more often than not in the company of others. It becomes in other words the secular equivalent of lived religion. If Woodhead's datasets are primarily quantitative, Lee draws in detail on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in southern England in order to develop new ways of thinking about noreligion and nonbelief: to do this properly requires not only an imaginative vocabulary but innovative methodologies and new theoretical approaches.

In my recent work,[6] I have approached the same questions from a different point of view: that is to recognize that in the early decades of the twenty-

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[3] Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 250.

[4] Linda Woodhead, "Fewer people are believing in God: but it's not because of science," *BBC Science Focus Magazine*, October 23, 2021, https://www.sciencefocus.com/science/why-are-fewer-people-believing-in-god/ (accessed August 19, 2022).

[5] Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[6] See, for example, Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015) and Grace Davie and Lucian Leustean, "Religion and Europe: Methods, Theories, and Approaches," in *The Oxford Handbook of Reli-*

first century, two things are happening at once in much of modern Europe. On the one hand, the process of secularization continues in all its complexity; the details may change but there is little prospect of reversal in the foreseeable future. At the same time, religious diversity is steadily increasing, driven by immigration, which – equally – shows little sign of diminishing. Both trends lead to the development of noreligion but in different ways. Secularization erodes – but does not eradicate – traditional forms of religious practice and religious belief, leaving behind the complex mix of doubt and belief already described. Growing religious diversity has a different outcome in that it leads inevitably to the return of religion to the public sphere, provoking not only invigorated public debate but some sharp reactions; these can include strongly-worded assertions of the secular in sections of society that resent – at times vehemently – renewed attention to religion. The situation is hard to handle, inevitably in so far as growing secularity undermines not only religious literacy per se, but the sensitivities that are required to manage the frequently difficult debates associated with religious diversity.

A Note on Believing without Belonging and Vicarious Religion

In the work that I published a decade or so earlier,[7] my focus was a little different. In the 1980s and 1990s, I was concerned with the disparity between what I termed the hard and soft indicators of belief and belonging across much of modern Europe. The sources were multiple,[8] but revealed a consistent pattern: that was the relatively high levels of religious belief, but as religious practice (belonging) dropped, this was accompanied by a noticeable drift from what might be termed orthodox believing to increasingly heterodox ideas. The trend towards nonbelief was already visible (and growing) but did not dominate the scene to the extent that it does now.

The notion of believing without belonging constituted my first attempt to understand this state of affairs. It was developed in detail in my first account of the British case,[9] which deployed this disparity as an organizing theme, paying particular attention to the ways in which it was manifested in different parts of society – contrasts that remain significant. It is still true, for example, that belief and belonging are better aligned amongst the more educated sections of the population than they are in the population as a whole.

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gion and Europe, eds. Grace Davie and Lucian Leustean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1-16.

[7] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) and Idem, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[8] Two large scale statistical enquiries were particularly important: the European Values Study, https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu and the International Social Survey Programme, https://issp.org. In the latter, religion was a highlighted topic in 1991, 1998, 2008, and 2018 (2nd data release).

[9] Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*.

Women, moreover, are different from men; they score higher on both variables. Equally predictable are the generational shifts as the young drift further from the inherited model. Geographical (regional, urban, rural) contexts were all significant, as indeed were the similar (yet distinctive) parallels in Europe.

The sequel was unexpected. Why was it that the phrase believing without belonging – an expression tucked in as an unofficial subtitle to a book on religion in Britain – caught the imagination of so many people? Why, in other words, did this catchy if rather imprecise idea "rapidly spread across the world and beyond the borders of scholarship"?[10] The extent of this discussion can be found by typing "believing without belonging" into an internet search engine. The expression appeared everywhere: in academic papers and more popular writing about the churches in Britain and Europe, in the statements of religious leaders, in religious journalism, in a variety of textbooks, and in student exam papers. Quite clearly, believing without belonging resonated with many, very different, constituencies. But why?

My response to this question – which goes beyond, well beyond, the limits of this chapter – can be found in a later publication.[11] More important to the present discussion is my second attempt to understand both the British and the European situation rather better. The separating out of belief from belonging undoubtedly offered fruitful ways in which to organize the material about religion in modern Britain. Ongoing reflection, however, encouraged me to think more deeply about these issues and in two ways. First was the recognition that belonging as well as belief comes in hard and soft versions, and second was the realization that the argument very largely turned on the relationship between the two: that is between the relatively restricted community of active believers who express their faith in more or less regular church-going, and the much larger penumbra who retain some sort of belief, and who wish from time to time to make contact with the institutions with which they identify.

The notion of vicarious religion emerged from these reflections; it pivots on the idea that the smaller group is doing something on behalf of the larger one, who are aware (if only implicitly) of this relationship. For example, churches and church leaders perform ritual on behalf of others; church leaders and churchgoers believe on behalf of others; church leaders and churchgoers embody moral codes on behalf of others; and churches can at times offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies.[12] It is worth noting that all of these functions have in common the perception of

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[10] David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, "Religion in Britain. Neither Believing nor Belonging," *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 11-12, https:/doi.org/10.1177/00380385050 48998.

[11] Davie, *Religion in Modern Britain*.

[12] The protracted ceremonial surrounding the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022 illustrated every one of these points. It became, almost, a laboratory of vicarious religion.

the church as a public utility: that is, an institution (or more accurately a cluster of institutions) that exists to make provision for a population living in a designated place, local or national, and that are found wanting if they fail to deliver. There are obvious parallels with secular life.

Once again, a lively debate ensued, though not quite to the extent of that provoked by believing without belonging, and as before, the detail lies beyond the scope of this paper – with one exception. Over and over again I was struck by the number of people who responded to a presentation on this theme with pertinent illustrations from their own context. The stories that emerged were fascinating. This was equally true in Europe,[13] even when I worked through an interpreter who had to think carefully in order to find an equivalent term to vicarious in his or her own language. In the United States, in contrast, there was almost no response to the idea at all – vicarious religion is not part of American self-understanding. The reason became clear very quickly: vicarious religion belongs to a state church (or public utility) model which does not exist in the United States; indeed, it is firmly rejected on ideological terms.

But what of the future? Given the sharp rise in noreligion and to an extent nonbelief in most parts of Europe, will either of these terms still resonate? My answer is that they will, but not always as I expected. The situation in Europe remains complex. An excellent overview can be found in a report from the Pew Research Center entitled "Being Christian in Western Europe." Published in 2018, it reveals that "non-practicing Christians (defined, for the purposes of this report, as people who identify as Christians, but attend church services no more than a few times per year) make up the biggest share of the population across the region."[14] A very similar picture emerges in the Appendices that conclude the *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe*,[15] which are given flesh and blood in the case studies gathered in Part V of the same volume. In short, the proportions of non-practicing Christians may be diminishing across the continent, but they remain nonetheless significant; so too do the tools and concepts devised to understand this situation.

All that said, it is the nonreligious sector that is growing the fastest, but its membership is unexpectedly diverse. The marked heterogeneity of their beliefs, for example, was a point well made by Linda Woodhead about the British case. Exactly the same finding is emphasized by Nicola Madge and

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[13] With the partial exception of France, a nation-state in which the state takes responsibility for almost every part of a citizen's life, leaving less space for the churches. That said the reactions of French people (and not only Catholics) to the fire in Notre Dame in April 2019 were entirely consistent with my understanding of vicarious religion.

[14] Pew Research Center, "Being Christian in Western Europe," May 29, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-euro pe/ (accessed August 19, 2022).

[15] See Gina Zurlo, "Religions in Europe: A Statistical Summary," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe*, eds. Grace Davie and Lucian Leustean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 793-797. The tables cover East and West Europe.

Peter Hemming who take their data from the fascinating Youth on Religion study.[16] Strikingly, they conclude that:

> […] only just over half (N = 976, 50.9%) of the survey sample identifying themselves as non-religious categorically stated that they did not believe in God. The largest group among the remainder (N = 485, 25.3%) were unsure about the existence of God, while 5.3% (N = 101) said they did not believe in God but did believe in a Higher Power of some kind, and 10% (N = 192) said they believed in God at least some of the time. Of the remainder, 6.1% (N = 116) said that they had doubts but did believe in God, and 2.5% (N = 47) were sure that God really exists.[17]

It is conclusions such as these that make me think that the notion of believing without belonging will be likely to endure despite everything, even if its meaning evolves to include those who position themselves beyond rather than within the limits of organized religion. Paradoxically this makes the epithet all the more apt.

The fate of vicarious religion is more worrying. A hint can be detected in a further finding from the Pew Research Center report: the fact that the religious, political, and cultural views of non-practicing Christians in West Europe differ both from those of church-attending Christians and from those of religiously unaffiliated adults. The variations are followed through in terms of attitudes towards churches and religious organizations on the one hand and immigrants and religious minorities on the other. On publication, a much-quoted strapline read as follows:

> Christian identity in Western Europe is associated with higher levels of negative sentiment toward immigrants and religious minorities. On balance, self-identified Christians – whether they attend church or not – are more likely than religiously unaffiliated people to express negative views of immigrants, as well as of Muslims and Jews.[18]

An additional source lies in the rapidly expanding literature on populism across Europe and the place of religion in this – in which, I was surprised to find, there are more than occasional references to vicarious religion utilized

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[16] Nicola Madge, Peter J. Hemming, and Kevin Stenson, *Youth on Religion: The Negotiation and Development of Faith and Non-Faith Identity* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[17] Nicola Madge and Peter J. Hemming, "Young British Religious 'Nones': Findings from the Youth on Religion Study," *Journal of Youth Studies* 20, no. 7 (2017): 880, https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1273518.

[18] Pew Research Center, "Being Christian in Western Europe," 9.

in ways that I did not intend and do not like.[19] As conceived in 2000, this captured an investment in the historic churches of Europe, understanding these as institutions that operated on behalf of a wider constituency who were appreciative of what the churches were doing, but were themselves largely, if not totally, inactive. Both the concept itself and the constituency that I had in mind were entirely benign and would, I thought, be unlikely to outlast the generation born in the aftermath of World War II. I was wrong, in so far as the debate has taken an unexpected turn: the essence of vicarious religion has been deployed very differently at least by some. No longer do the Christian churches represent a cherished and somewhat wistful connection to the past; they become instead a potent means to resist outsiders, notably Muslims.

Interestingly, for many authors the link is found precisely in the disconnect between belief and belonging: without a firm base in theology or, as Max Weber put it, a religious ethic – Christianity, together with the heritage that it represents, is vulnerable to misuse. Its re-modelling as culturalized religion, or Christianism, may be well-intentioned in the first instance, but brings with it associated risks: that is the deployment of a Christian heritage to exclude rather than include, at times aggressively. It is a shift that active churchgoers frequently resist, a nuance that can also be found in the detail – if not the headlines – of *Being Christian in Western Europe*.[20] It is, finally, evidence of a point already made: that to understand the religious situation in Europe in the early decades of the twenty-first century, it is necessary to pay attention to *both* the continuing – some would say remorseless – process of secularization *and* growing religious diversity.

Thinking Comparatively

The aim of this section is to bring at least some of these statements to life, and to look at particular – necessarily selected – cases.[21] Their relative

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[19] An excellent overview of the burgeoning work in this field can be found in Avi Astor and Damon Mayrl, "Culturalized Religion: A Synthetic Review and Agenda for Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59, no. 2 (2020): 209-226, https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12661. See also the chapters brought together in Morteza Hashemi and Chris Cotter, eds. *Religion in Fortress Europe: Perspectives on Belief, Citizenship and Identity in a Time of Polarized Politics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), and Anna Henning and Mirjam Weiberg-Salzmann, eds. *Illiberal Politics and Religion in Europe and Beyond: Concepts, Actors and Identity Narratives* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2021), and the thesis presented in Tobias Cremer, *The Godless Crusade: Religion, Politics and Right Wing Identity Politics in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

[20] See Cremer, *The Godless Crusade*.

[21] The material draws considerably on the chapters brought together in Grace Davie and Lucian Leustean, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), noting in particular Chapter 31, Josh Bullock and

situations will be better understood in light of the following figure, which draws on data from the 2016 European Social Survey to reveal the proportions of the total adult population, and of 16 to 29 year olds, who identify as having no religion in selected European countries.
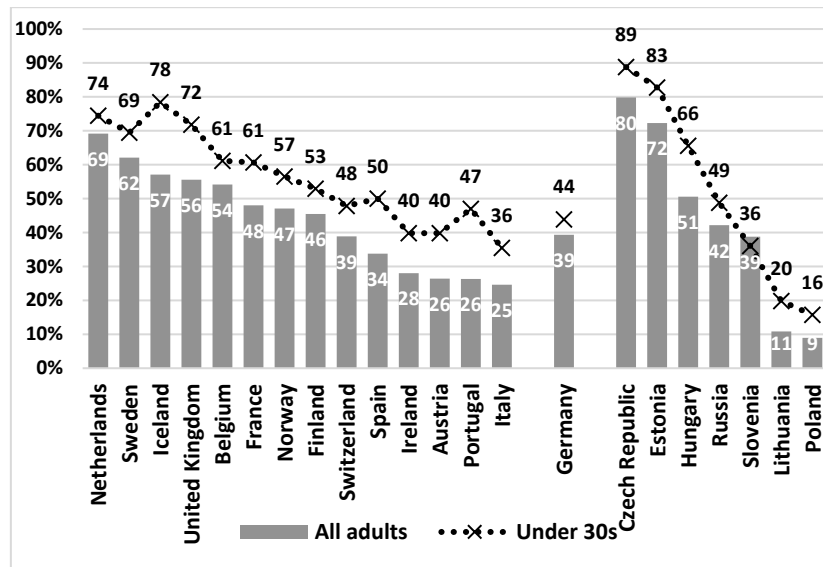

Figure 1. Proportions of total adult population, and of 16-29 year olds, identifying as having no religion in selected European countries, 2016 (European Social Survey, 2016; weighted data).[22]

A number of points stand out. First are the parameters of the figure itself: the measurement here is of noreligion (rather than nonbelief) and includes an indication of generational changes. With one exception the trend towards noreligion is more developed among 16 to 29 year olds than in the population as a whole. The data are subdivided between Western Europe and the former communist countries; Germany is placed in the middle given its unique history in this respect. Second are the differences displayed by the data both between individual countries, and between the two regions in terms of the proportions of people claiming noreligion – the range of results in the former communist countries is markedly larger than that in the West. Confessional differences must also be taken into account. By and large Catholic cultures are more resilient than their Protestant equivalents; there are, however, some notable exceptions.

A closer look at four of the nation-states – the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden – found at the more secular end of Western Europe reveals the importance of qualitative as much as quantitative features. The legacies of history, for example, are not only important in themselves but influence the ways in which noreligion as such is understood. Take, for example, the difference between the United Kingdom and France. The former is made up of four different countries, each of which has a particular religious history.[23] By far the largest is England which experienced a distinctive form of the Reformation in the sixteenth century resulting eventually (the twists and turns are complex) in an established Church, a cluster of Protestant denominations and sizeable Catholic minority. As a result, the United Kingdom has experienced a degree of religious diversity for centuries rather than decades, a mix in which noreligion and/or nonbelief can find a place. There isn't space in this chapter to include the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish variations except to note not only their more developed Protestantism if compared with England, but also the exceptional nature of Northern Ireland, which must be considered *sui generis*. It is the only part of the United Kingdom where religion and politics remain closely – and at times dangerously – intertwined.

France is very different. Here an overwhelmingly dominant Catholic Church was protected for centuries by monarchical power. Thus, the resistance to the Reformation was not only protracted but twofold; it was as much political as religious. The Edict of Nantes (1598) brought some respite for the Protestant Huguenots, but its Revocation some hundred years later (1695) unleashed new levels of persecution. The Huguenots had two options: either to convert or to flee. Thus – in contrast to Britain – France did not acquire its religious diversity incrementally. Instead, the challenge to both the Catholic Church and the crown came to a head at the time of the Revolution, the point when Protestants – and Jews as well – finally gained both civil and political rights. The ensuing debates dominated French history throughout the nineteenth century, in a series of confrontations referred to as "la guerre des deux Frances": one monarchical, Catholic and conservative, the other republican, *laïque*, and progressive.[24] In 1905, the Republic triumphed definitively.

This sequence of events, in which the notion of *laïcité* is pivotal, is part of French self-understanding. The following comparison reflects this; necessarily speculative, it raises an interesting question. France is a self-consciously secular Republic; it is institutionally and constitutionally very different from the United Kingdom, which retains a monarchy, an unelected House of Lords, and an established Church. Thus, on every count France must be considered a more – or at the very least differently – democratic country from the United Kingdom; it is however markedly less tolerant than its Northern

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[23] Davie, *Religion in Modern Britain*, Chapter 5.

[24] Emile Poulat, *Liberté, laïcité: La guerre des deux France et le principe de la modernité* (Paris: Cerf, 1988).

neighbor, at least in terms of religion.[25] It follows that the complex connections between (types of) democracy, secular developments, and religious toleration require very careful scrutiny. Part of this debate concerns the framing of noreligion and nonbelief. In France, these ideas are far more politicized than they are in Britain. Appreciating this difference is, in my view, as important as the statistical variations between the two countries.

The situation in the Netherlands is different again. Figure 1 reveals that the proportion of the population claiming noreligion is the highest in this part of Europe, a trend that has accelerated in recent years.[26] The historical background is, once again, distinctive. Dutch society – like its near neighbor Belgium – dealt with its religious diversity in a particular way: by constructing pillars in which the different sections of the population lived their secular as well as religious lives from the cradle to the grave. In the Dutch case, there were Catholic, Reformed (including Re-reformed), and secular pillars, divisions which pervaded almost every aspect of society. This system persisted well into the post-war period and – to an extent – resisted change. As a result, secularization arrived late in this part of Europe, but when it came, it came fast. Churchgoing collapsed along with the pillars, a shift that coincided more or less with the arrival of Islam. The key decades in this respect were the 1970s and 1980s.

Not everything happened at once. By the 1990s, however, the growing numbers of Muslims were beginning to challenge the long-established tolerance of Dutch society, a change in mood epitomized by the murders of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and Theo van Gogh just two years later. Both individuals, paradoxically, were attempting to defend the liberal values espoused by the majority by advocating illiberalism, meaning by this the exclusion from society of those (notably Muslims) who do not share the views of the majority.[27] Some thirty years later, there are hints that a new – and subtly different – formulation is beginning to emerge. This takes the form of a cleavage between conservative believers (both Christian and Muslim) on the one hand and more liberal believers and nonbelievers (i.e. the vast majority) on the other. In some debates at least, the former are beginning to align with each other to challenge the assumptions of an overwhelmingly secular environment.[28] In a fascinating chapter entitled "*'Christian Culture' and Its Others: Culturalised Religion, Islam and Confessional Christianity in the Netherlands,*" Daan Beekers turns the question the other way round, demonstrating

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[25] Sadly, this claim is harder to sustain than it used to be, notably following the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 and the acrimonious debates surrounding the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union in the following year.

[26] Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen, and Willem Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving. Diversiteit en verandering in beeld.* Deel 3: *Buiten kerk en moskee* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2022).

[27] Grace Davie, "Pluralism, Tolerance, and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe," in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, ed. Thomas Banchoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 223-242.

[28] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving*, 160.

how a markedly secular culturalization of Christianity in the Netherlands results in antagonism towards confessional religious communities of all kinds: Christian as well as Muslim.[29]

A final example can be found in the Swedish case, itself a variation on the Nordic theme of low levels of practice and belief alongside unusually high levels of church membership. Again, the explanation can be found in a distinctive history. Lutheran since the Reformation, the Nordic churches have been closely aligned with their respective states, and in all five countries, church membership was the default position for the population as a whole. Not until the mid-nineteenth century (1860) were Swedish citizens permitted to leave the Church of Sweden and then only to become a member of an alternative (and approved) Christian denomination. Some hundred years later (1951) it was possible simply to leave without giving a reason. Formal separation between Church and state came in 2000, since when church membership has declined sharply but remains high by European standards. Bit by bit, the mentality is shifting to contracting in rather than out: it is, however, a slow process.

The implications for noreligion and nonbelief are considerable, a point strikingly illustrated by the Norwegian case study included in Bullock's and Bullivant's chapter on "Non-religion and Europe."[30] Founded in 1956, the state-funded Norwegian Humanist Association (*Human-Etisk Forbund* (NHA) is one of the largest Humanist Associations in the world (and the largest of all in proportion to population); it has more than 90,000 members, equaling 2 percent of the Norwegian population. Effectively, it exists as a parallel church to offer the rituals traditionally offered by the Lutheran Church, among them confirmation – an important rite of passage in Norway for historical reasons. In 2019 some 20 percent (circa 12,000) of fifteen-year-olds opted for an NHA confirmation, as against 60 percent who opted for the Lutheran rite, and 20 percent for nothing at all – proportions that remain very constant. A significant question follows: where should the line between religion and noreligion be drawn? Interestingly *Statistics Norway* deploys the following categorization: "Religious communities and life stance communities outside the Church of Norway" which *includes* rather than excludes philosophy.[31]

A second set of case studies expands on the range of possibilities found at the other end of the graph in Figure 1; these were the former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where a very different set of

[29] Daan Beekers, "'Christian Culture' and its Others: Culturalised Religion, Islam and Confessional Christianity in the Netherlands," in *Religion in Fortress Europe*.

[30] Bullock and Bullivant, "Non-religion and Europe," 561-562.

[31] See Inger Furseth, "Nordic Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe*, eds. Grace Davie and Lucian Leustean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 697-712 and Statistisk sentralbyrö (Statistics Norway), "Religious communities and life stance communities," https://www.ssb.no/en/kultur-og-fritid/religion-og-livssyn/statistikk/trus-og-livssynssamfunn-utanfor-den-norske-kyrkja (accessed August 19, 2022).

circumstances in the post-war decades led, unsurprisingly, to different out-comes. In a provocative chapter, published in *Forbidden Revolutions*, David Martin examines these contrasts in terms of secularization. He describes the standard problematic of secularization as follows: "the fragmentation of the comprehensive frames that in the past held together the social world. Things really do fall apart and the centre does not hold, religiously or ideologi-cally."[32] In West Europe, this happened though differently in different places; the cases described above illustrate the point very well. In Russia and Central and Eastern Europe, however, a rather different scenario presented itself: here religion, supplanted at the center by communism, had been banished to the margins. It became, therefore, the carrier of an alternative memory and was spared the corrosions of the center at least to some extent. Understanding the privilege of the margin is a central theme in Martin's account.

The interconnections between religion and the break-up of the Soviet Union are complex, to say the least. That said, the significance of religion is considerable both before and after 1989. With respect to the former, the role of John Paul II and the Catholic Church in Poland are universally recognized. The Pope, accompanied by the world's media, returned to his homeland for his first pastoral visit in 1979; the Polish authorities were powerless as the population flocked to attend mass. Spirits were lifted and the Church affirmed as a channel of peaceful opposition. The Solidarity movement emerged a year later, setting in place an inexorable chain of events. Interestingly, however, an equally effective example can be found in East Germany, where – at the critical moment in 1989 – a tiny, infiltrated, and seriously weakened Lutheran church also became the focus of political resistance. In the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig, meetings for religious discussion became more and more political and gradually spilled out into the streets. Once again, the battle was won simply by force of numbers as tens of thousands of East Germans chanted "Wir sind das Volk" or "we are the people."

The longer-term outcomes, however, are strikingly different: in some parts of Central Europe, both belief and practice remain an enduring – and visible – presence in society: Poland is a case in point. In others, the indicators fell away sharply and have never recovered: East Germany – if not Germany as a whole – falls into this category. And as Figure 1 indicates, the implica-tions for noreligion are considerable, outcomes in which confessional differ-ences also play a part. As in the West, Catholic cultures have proved more resistant to noreligion than their Protestant equivalents. So – it should be noted – have the Orthodox churches further East.

A second case study taken from Bullock's and Bullivant's chapter reveals a further dimension of the Polish case.[33] The Fundacja (foundation)

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[32] David Martin, *Forbidden Revolutions: Pentecostalism in Latin America, Catholi-cism in Eastern Europe* (London: SPCK, 1996), 67.

[33] See Bullock and Bullivant, "Non-religion and Europe," 562-563 and Kazimierz Łyszczyński Foundation, https://lyszczynski.com.pl/index.php/en/about-us/ (ac-cessed August 19, 2022)

im. Kazimierz Łyszczyński (KLF) was established in 2013 and is named for the seventeenth-century author of *De non existentia Dei* (*On the non-existence of God*). In communist Poland Łyszczyński was celebrated as a martyr to the atheist cause. KLF exists to promote freedom of conscience in word and expression, and to endorse atheism and secular ethics as a worldview. Specifically, it is an advocate of a secular state, more especially of secular education, and defends the rights of people experiencing discrimination on the basis of "worldview, gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity." Finally, KLF works to encourage the growth of atheist communities in Poland and their ability to cooperate with similar organizations across the world. The subtext is very clear: none of these things can be taken for granted in twenty-first century Poland – a situation that could hardly be more different from those in East Germany, Estonia, and the Czech Republic, all three of which are regularly cited among the most secular countries in Europe. As ever, present circumstances interact with specific histories to produce distinctive – and at times unexpected – outcomes.

Nowhere more so than in Russia. Placed in Figure 1 at the mid-way point on the graph in terms of the presence of noreligion, Russia has veered from one extreme to the other. The details of this centuries-long narrative are the stuff of books rather than chapters, but they include the protracted persecution of religion for much of the twentieth century. As Coleman puts this: "[t]he Bolsheviks came to power determined to create not just a secular government but a new civilization free of all religion,"[34] and set about this task at every level of society: ideologies were reworked; the apparatus of the state was secularized; religion was declared a private matter; religious property was nationalized, and the Church denied subsidies. The waves of persecution ebbed and flowed in their intensity, but by the 1980s, the USSR was considered a highly secularized society, in which a majority claimed to be atheists. So much so, that no one – no one at all – predicted the changes that were to come as new and independent post-Soviet identities emerged amidst the marked, some would say dramatic, religious revival that followed the fall of communism. Exactly what this means in terms of the beliefs and commitments of ordinary Russian people is more difficult to say. It is also true that the re-Christianization of Russia by the Russian Orthodox Church has not only challenged pluralism (religious minorities are dangerously exposed), but Western understandings of human rights regarding the freedom of religion and belief.

The situation in Russia continues to dismay. The invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 brought things to a head, and within this the much-remarked relationship between President Putin and Patriarch Kirill, who portray them-

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[34] Heather Coleman, "Ukraine and Russia," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe*, eds. Grace Davie and Lucian Leustean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 770.

selves as defenders of the Russian world (Russkii mir).[35] There is, they claim, a transnational Russian sphere or civilization, called Holy Russia or Holy Rus′, which includes Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (and sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan). Seen from this perspective, Ukraine becomes a dangerous gateway to the West through which Western ideals – among them democracy, a market economy, secularity, diversity, and tolerance – become a threat to civilization itself. Put differently, a culture war has tipped inexorably into a religious one, making it all the more difficult to resolve.

It isn't easy to assess the very varied cases in Central and East Europe in terms of the presence or otherwise of noreligion and nonbelief. At the very least, however, they warn against easy generalizations about the present, or uncritical assumptions about the future. Things can and do change and not always in the direction anticipated. It should also caution against value judgments. Religious belief and/or practice may or may not be beneficial to society, or to particular parts of it. What is admirable in Poland as a bulwark against communism becomes oppressive in later decades. The same, in different circumstances, can be true of the secular and secularism.

A Global Postscript

A short postscript places the European cases in a global perspective. It does this in two ways. The first draws on a further piece of work by David Martin, which compares transnational voluntarism and organic territorialism. The principal focus of this essay is a better understanding of the ways in which Pentecostalism takes root in the societies of which it is part. I am struck that much of the argument concerning the European case applies equally to noreligion and nonbelief.

Martin sets out the parameters as follows:

> The big contrast on the global scale is between transnational voluntarism, and those forms of religion based on a closed market, which regard certain territories as their peculiar and sacred preserve, and assume an isomorphic relation between kin, ethnicity and faith. The principle of the transnational voluntary organisation competes globally with the religions of place and ethnicity.[36]

The salient point in terms of this chapter is that the exercise of choice is different in each case. The voluntary principle allows for change (that is the

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[35] For more information about *Russkii mir*, see https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/ (accessed August 19, 2022).

[36] David Martin, "Niche Markets Created by a Fissile Transnational Faith," in *Religions in Movement: The Local and the Global in Contemporary Faith Traditions*, eds. Robert W. Hefner, John Hutchinson, Sara Mels, and Christianne Zimmerman (New York: Routledge, 2013), 185.

whole point), but to convert from religions of place and ethnicity either to another religion, *or to none at all*, is very different; to some extent at least it will imply a break with family, tribe, or nation. There will, therefore, be sanctions running along a scale from mild disapproval to symbolic death or – in the most extreme cases – death itself.

In terms of distribution: "[t]he global variations run along a scale from North America, where it [the exercise of choice] is normal, to Western Europe and Australasia, where it is accepted but not all that frequent, to the Arabian Peninsula, which is by definition Islamic territory where even foreigners cannot establish their own sacred buildings."[37] Western Europe – it is clear – finds its place more or less in the middle of the continuum, reflecting the situation described in the Pew Research Center report quoted on p. 90 (above), and captured conceptually in the notions of believing without belonging and vicarious religion. To a greater or lesser extent, West Europeans are choosing to opt out of their historic churches; few, however, experience sanctions when they do this.

Applying Martin's approach enables a better understanding not only of the presence but the nature of noreligion in different parts of Europe. Martin notes, for example, that Eastern and much of Central Europe are different from the West, to the extent that they display "a closer fusion of religion and ethnicity," reinforced in many cases by the enforced secularization of the post-war period. Even more interesting is Martin's observation that East Germany, the Czech Republic, and Estonia constitute partial exceptions to this rule, a conclusion that fits perfectly with their location on the graph in Figure 1.[38] An additional point merits reflection. Martin notes the higher impact of Pentecostalism in the transitional areas of mixed religion in Europe, one of which is Western Ukraine. In short, right across Europe, his analysis reflects the patterns established by both the quantitative and qualitative findings set out above. Is this, or is it not, a coincidence?

A second set of issues is raised by asking a different set of questions. My enquiries in this respect started with a book entitled *Europe: The Exceptional Case.*[39] Published in 2002, it complemented the volume on *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* that appeared a couple of years earlier, and did this by looking at Europe from the outside rather than from within. Specifically, it asked whether the relative secularity of Europe as observed at the beginning of the new millennium was best seen as a global prototype or as an exceptional case. Is it the case, in other words, that as the world modernizes, it will necessarily secularize, or is the situation in Europe sui generis? Further questions follow regarding the relationship between modernization and secularization; is this intrinsic (meaning embedded) or ex-

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[37] Martin, "Niche Markets."

[38] The extreme position of East Germany in this respect is, of course, masked by its amalgamation with the former West in terms of those expressing noreligion.

[39] Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002).

trinsic (meaning context dependent)? Alternatively, is Europe secular because it is modern, or is Europe secular because it is European?

To attempt an answer to these questions, I drew on the (then) recently published work of Shmuel Eisenstadt on multiple modernities, which right from the start challenged two assumptions: that modernizing societies are convergent and the notion that Europe (or indeed anywhere else) is the lead society of the modernizing process.[40] What then is the authentic core of modernity? The question is, necessarily, difficult to answer in that modernity is more of an attitude (a distinctive epistemology) than a set of characteristics. In its early forms, it embodied above all a notion of the future which was realizable by means of human agency. As soon as the process was set in motion, however, even the core of modernity was beset by internal contradictions. Hence, for example, the different formulations of the nation-state that emerged in different parts of Europe: Britain and France offer excellent examples. And as the idea of modernity transferred itself first across the Atlantic and then out of the West altogether, the possibilities for transformation expanded accordingly. As Eisenstadt explains, diversity must be assumed within the modernizing process; it is in fact part of modernity itself.

Eisenstadt's work opened up a plethora of new challenges, generating a huge secondary literature. The work of the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences (CASHSS) at the University of Leipzig on Multiple Secularities constitutes an important element within this. The members of the CASHSS team have set themselves a demanding agenda, including both conceptual refinement and a growing range of case studies as they seek to understand better what, in an early article, they termed "cultures of secularity."[41] Their current aim is a strikingly ambitious study of the religious and the secular, responding in particular to the need for a more developed historicization and contextualization of the "theories, analytical categories and comparative concepts" deployed.[42] The scope and detail of their work are impressive. Approaches of this nature must, surely, be the context for a more developed understanding of noreligion and nonbelief both in Europe and beyond.

Concluding Remarks

Taking each of the above sections in turn, I become increasingly convinced of the need to see religion and noreligion / belief and nonbelief in

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[40] Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus*, 129, no. 1 (2000): 1-29

[41] Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt, "Multiple Secularities: Toward a Cultural Sociology of Secular Modernities," *Comparative Sociology* 11 (2012): 875-909, https:/doi.org/10.1163/15691330-12341249.

[42] Christoph Kleine and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Preliminary Findings and Outlook of the CASHSS 'Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities'," Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities: Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities," 22, Leipzig University, 2020, https://doi.org/10.36730/2020.1.msbwbm.22.

terms of a spectrum – or series of spectra – rather than typologies; not only are the boundaries far from clear, they continue to evolve. This is plainly evident in the quantitative material on the United Kingdom as this is set out both by Linda Woodhead and the authors of the Youth and Religion study. It is equally so for the case studies drawn from Figure 1, keeping in mind that each of these requires careful contextualization. And Europe itself must be set in a global perspective. David Martin does this in terms of choice: to what extent is it permissible to leave a religion and for what reasons, and where, exactly, do the boundaries lie? It is true that the members of the Multiple Secularities team have, at times, worked with typologies,[43] but their current aim is to explore the complex relationships between the religious and the secular in an ever-expanding range of contexts and cases, historical as well as geographical. They are correct in saying that this is necessarily an inter-disciplinary as well as a global endeavor as scholars from different backgrounds explore a continually changing canvas.

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[43] Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt, "Multiple Secularities."

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Faith and Beliefs of Nonbelievers

Anthony J. Carroll

Introduction

Asking the question, do you believe in God?, seems a straightforward thing to do. Until, that is, you begin to think seriously about the question. As soon as you start to do so, the question inevitably becomes problematic. The simplistic way that this question is often posed, in many sociological surveys, for example, seems to imply that believing in God resembles an empirical or a rational claim that can be assessed by a simple propositional answer such as: "yes, I do"; or "no, I do not." However, I think that this kind of question, often used by social scientific research on religion, makes a fundamental mistake of confusing religious belief with *ordinary* empirical and rational belief claims.

By *ordinary* empirical belief claims, I mean the kind of claim which can be verified by the experience of our senses, such as, for example, that there is a computer screen in front of me while I am typing this essay. By *ordinary* rational belief claims, I mean the kind of claim which is verified by the use of logical argument, such as 2+2=4, and does not require empirical verification. This kind of belief is evident from simply understanding the meaning of the relations between the terms involved, as is obviously also the case for purely semantic relations, such as bachelors are unmarried men. If you know the meaning of the term bachelor, then you naturally understand that this entails that all instances of unmarried men are by definition bachelors. There is a straightforward logical entailment based on semantics.

However, belief, or nonbelief, in God is inadequately understood when it is understood as one of these ordinary kinds of belief claims. While religious belief may be associated with experience and justified in rational argumentation, it is not properly understood through either of these kinds of epistemic processes. The reason for this is that God is not an object of belief open to either empirical or rational verification or refutation. You cannot see God in the way that you can see the sky, and you cannot reason your way to or from God in the way that you can work out the answer to a quadratic equation. Religious belief implies trusting in (faith) so as to believe, as St. Anselm famously put it in his *Proslogion* (II-IV), *fides quarens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding).

Part of the problem, but only part, is that the word belief is ambiguous. It can mean assenting to a propositional state of affairs such as, this table is square and it can also mean trusting in someone, as when we say, I believe in you, my friend. Belief in the religious sense is a relational concept, which involves personal engagement with the absolute mystery of God. This mystery is something about which we can never exhaust our knowledge. If,

as much of the Christian tradition has argued, God is infinite mystery, then asking the question of whether you believe in infinite mystery should not be handled *in the same way* as asking the question whether you believe in tables and chairs or strictly logical and or semantic relations. If it is posed in these ways, then we can only conclude that the question lacks a sufficient theological basis for it to be a well-formed question. While it may be kind to say to children there are no stupid questions, adults should realize that there are inadequately posed questions, which require reformulation in order to warrant a reasonable answer. Asking the question, do you believe in God?, and requiring a simple yes or no answer, is an example of such an inadequately formulated question.

This complicates the social scientific assessment of religious belief that wants simple survey answers to the religious question. However, if the question is driven by the social scientific need to accumulate data, rather than by the theological assessment of the nature of the question, then inadequate answers can only be delivered, because the data obtained is based on poorly formulated questions. That is, of course, if you consider theology to regulate the grammar of such questions. If this is indeed the case, then it might be better to stop asking this question and to think anew about what an appropriate way to proceed might look like. But how should we think about the question of religious belief? Let me sketch the beginnings of an answer in a biographical way.

A Perspective from the United Kingdom

As I have suggested above, it is my contention that the standard social-scientific manner of considering belief in God is problematic. Definitive conclusions drawn about increases or decreases of belief seem to be assuming that they can un-problematically address these complex issues with simplistic questions. This has been compounded by a certain polarization between believers and nonbelievers in recent polemical exchanges.

In order to explore ways of moving beyond these divides, at the invitation of Brian Pearce OBE, the former head of the British interfaith network, I joined with Professor Richard Norman, a philosopher and patron of *Humanists UK*, to work on a project to bridge the divide between people who consider themselves to be either religious or not. In 2016 the result of this work was published as *Religion and Atheism: Beyond the Divide*. It consisted of 19 essays from individual contributors, one dialogue between the former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and the humanist scientist and polymath Raymond Tallis, and a joint conclusion to the book from Richard Norman and myself outlining central themes and further questions to be explored. Following the publication of this book, we promoted and engaged in a series of workshops, conferences, and debates which furthered the explorations of these issues that had been embarked on in the initial publication. This also allowed me to develop my own thoughts in dialogue with others.

An invitation to speak on these issues at the Bruno Kessler Foundation in Trent, Italy during an annual lecture series also gave me the opportunity to formulate these thoughts in a further publication, *Il Giardiniere Invisibile: Credere, Non credere, Cercare*.[1]

The more that I have engaged in exchanges on these questions, the more I have come to see that the current situation of believing and not believing rests on conceptions of God that suffer from using language, images and concepts, and metaphors that no longer work for both sides of the divide. An analogy might help to make this point clearer. It seems as if we are in a situation where what we take to be in the night sky is decided, not by scientific research, but rather by popular views of the heavens. In other words, we are living in a theologically illiterate culture and the effect of this is that what people are taught about God and religion tends toward the half-formed, ill-informed, or completely uninformed position. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the image of God as the man in the sky with the white beard whom one can call on in times of trouble is not very far from the general popular conception of God. It is more often than not this conception of God, or something essentially similar to it, that people are making truth claims about in answering the question as to whether they believe in God or not.

In order to explore further these problems for the investigation of religious belief today, I will turn now to briefly survey some of the most recent attempts to chart religious belief and nonbelief in the British context. This will help to clarify problems associated with obtaining an accurate picture of this domain of societal life and hence of the need to rethink how we approach the study of religion and religious belief today.

The Profile of Religious Belief in Britain

For the former United Kingdom education secretary Charles Clarke and the sociologist of religion Linda Woodhead, we are "living through the single biggest change in the religious and cultural landscape of Britain for centuries."[2]

From a sociological point of view, we might talk of three factors:

1) Beliefs,
2) Belonging and Identity
3) Practice and Behavior.

These factors can be correlated with one another and the problematic issue that arises when we do this is that they do not match – more people

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[1] Anthony J. Carroll, *Il Giardiniere Invisibile: Credere, Non credere, Cercare* (Bologna: EDB, 2019)

[2] Linda Woodhead and Charles Clarke, *A New Settlement Revised. Religion and Belief in Schools. Westminster Faith Debates* (London: NASACRE, 2018), 1.

identify with a particular religion than hold the beliefs associated with it! For example, in a *YouGov* survey for the same series of Linda Woodhead's Westminster Faith Debates in 2013, less than one-third of Anglicans said that there definitely was a God; one-third probably. One in seven said they engaged in religious practices with other people. In 2015, a *YouGov* poll reported that over one-fifth of the nonreligious believe in some sort of spiritual power, including some who call this God! Asking people in a positive manner about whether they are religious or consider themselves to have a religious identity significantly shapes the answer given to the question.

Cognizant of this question bias, the British Social Attitudes Survey, *The National Census Social Attitude Survey* (BSA) attempts to ask a more objective two-step question: "Do you regard yourself as belonging to a particular religion?" If Yes, then the follow-up question is: "Which?" The *UK Census*, which is a once-in-a-decade national survey of all households in the United Kingdom, tends to boost the number of religious believers compared to the BSA and other polls because of the way the questions concerning religious belief are asked. For example, in 2001 and 2011 the *UK Census* posed the question of religious belief in the following manner, "What is your religion?" In order to improve on this manner of obtaining data, the *BSA Survey* has provided a 40-year longitudinal time frame in which to contextualize the data obtained and provides a series of more detailed questions which enable a better breakdown of the data, and so it is generally considered to be a more reliable indicator for British data on religion and nonbelief.

From the BSA Survey data, three major long-term changes stand out:

1. *There is an increase in the number of people who say they do not have a religious identity*. In 1983-85, under 35% said "no" in response to the BSA question. In 2016-18 it was over 50%. And for 15-25 year olds, around 70%.

2. *The mix within the religion category has become much more diverse*. In the early 1950s, Britain was mainly a Christian country, with a nonreligious minority, a Jewish community of around 400,000, plus a scattering of others. Now, 5% of Brits are Muslims, 2% Hindus, between 0.5 and 1.0% Sikhs and Jews respectively, plus a long list of others including Buddhists, Baha'is, Zoroastrians and Pagans.

3. A third change is taking place within religion or belief groupings themselves, including *the decline in Anglicanism*. Nearly 40% of the population still identify as some type of Christian, but identification with the Church of England is falling off the cliff! This is down from 40% in 1983-85 to under 15% now. Of those brought up in Anglican households, only half remain Anglican now. Only 1% of 18-24-year olds identify with the Church of England, so the downwards trend looks highly likely to continue.

Of interest too, is the fact that as the numbers in the Church of England decline, its center of gravity is moving toward the Evangelical pole of its traditional bi-polar Catholic-Protestant spectrum (reflecting the current Arch-

bishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby's own position towards the Protestant position). Consequently, it appears as if the Church of England is shifting from being a moderate middle of the road religion to tending toward the more sectarian, catering primarily for an Evangelical minority of hard core believers. This is a considerable shift in the profile of British religious belief, not least because Anglicanism is the established Church of England with roots going back to St Augustine of Canterbury who arrived in Kent in 597. The King is the formal head of the Church of England, it has 26 bishops in the House of Lords and it is the third richest charity in the United Kingdom acting as a custodian to some of the most beautiful buildings and music in the United Kingdom. The change in religious profile thus has wider social and political implications for the identity and character of the United Kingdom.

Other traditional Protestant Churches, such as Methodists and Baptists, are also in steep decline. However, one Christian indicator on the BSA chart is going up: "Christian – no denomination." It is now about the same as Anglicans, around 15%.

The Private Consultancy *Brierley*, identifies three increasing trends in Christianity:

- Orthodox Churches responding to immigration from South East Europe
- Pentecostals (many with African roots)
- Evangelical New Churches.

In short, these trends would seem to indicate that the long-term future of British Protestantism will be mainly Evangelical in a majoritarian secular context.

For the Roman Catholics, attendance at the Sunday Eucharist is about a third of what it was in the early 1980s, but the numbers identifying as Roman Catholic have remained fairly constant at around 8%, though lower in the younger age groups. This is mainly due to immigration from Poland and other majority Roman Catholic countries. It underlines the distinction between those who identify as Roman Catholics, Roman Catholicism as a set of beliefs, and the Roman Catholic Church as an institution.

In 2013, a survey conducted by Linda Woodhead of British Catholics revealed under half commented that they definitely believed in God or some higher power, with a further quarter saying there probably is a God or higher power. This figure is greater than for Anglicans, but not significantly. Although Roman Catholic identity seems stronger than Anglican identity, around 60% of people brought up in Roman Catholic households still identify as Roman Catholic, without new Roman Catholic immigration, the trend downwards will be inevitable in Britain.

The situation for other religious traditions displays significant differences from those of Christianity. The most interesting trends are for Islam. For instance, Islam represents 5% of the population and is growing. According to the 2018 IPSOS-MORI poll, more than half pray five times a day

and mosque attendance is high. There are two mosques with over 5000 capacities in London, Birmingham, and Bradford. Most mosques are Sunni, half are run by conservative Deobandis or Salafis, and over a quarter by mystical Baralevis or other Sufis. About 6% are Shia, including Ismaili's and half of Muslims are under 25 years of age.

The Profile of the Nonreligious in Britain

The Nonreligious are the biggest group of all in Britain, but they are no more homogeneous than the other religious groups. Two surveys by *YouGov* for the Charity *Humanists UK* have asked nonreligious people for their views on what makes something right or wrong, the role of science and evidence in understanding the universe, and the role of empathy and compassion in moral decisions. The results indicate that roughly half have a broadly humanist view, and so hold nonreligious opinions on these answers.

The population studied by the *Understanding Nonbelief* Project is based not on belonging or identity, but on belief, those who say they do not believe in God, or do not know whether there is a God, and do not believe there is any way to find out – Atheists and Agnostics in other words. The United Kingdom sample included 15% who identified as Christians. The most popular self-description is Nonreligious, then Atheist, then Agnostic, and no label was preferred by around a third of respondents. Over 25% of atheists had a fatalistic view believing significant events were meant to be and due to underlying forces of good and evil. Under 30% had a completely naturalistic worldview. The conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that in this multi-dimensional landscape the idea of a simple division between the religious and the nonreligious looks increasingly untenable.

Conclusion

In many ways, the results of the various surveys into religious belief and nonbelief confirm my theoretical complexifications of these questions with which I began this essay. At both theoretical and empirical levels of analysis, it seems that we do not know how to study religious belief today. Data would seem to suggest that the mainstream churches are losing adherents and new forms of religious expression, especially within the Evangelical traditions, are on the increase. Also on the rise are the so-called nones. This category represents those people without any religious affiliation, and its increase tends to be corroborated by other international surveys. They are undoubtedly a phenomenon that requires research today.

However, failure to engage seriously with the complex theological grammar of these questions hinders advancing the *status questionis* regarding religion and religious belief today. Sociological surveys will often seek to bracket these theological issues for the sake of the ease of their methodolo-

gical approaches which are often methodologically atheist. However, doing so raises the question of neutrality with which this scientific approach claims to proceed. Grasping at the default position through such approaches betrays a false neutrality which reveals firm commitments. The way forward would seem to require serious dialogue between scholars involved in sociological and theological research, no doubt with the aid of the mediating role of philosophy, to ensure that the various methodological approaches are guided by the highest standards of rationality.

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Studying Nonreligion:
Methodological Lessons from the Netherlands

WILLIAM R. ARFMAN and ANKE I. LIEFBROER

In this position paper, we argue that if we want to understand (non)-religion as it occurs in Europe today, we first need to reassess how we have been studying the ways in which secularization manifests itself. To achieve this, we need to look closely at those countries that have been at the forefront of the secularization processes in question. This concerns countries that have faced what Tomáš Halík has called "hard secularization,"[1] involving state-imposed atheism, as well as those that have undergone processes of so-called soft secularization, where such top-down force is absent. It can be argued that the Netherlands is a key instance of the latter type of secularization.[2] The question, then, is what can we learn from the Dutch situation regarding the challenges of and opportunities for doing research on the experiences of those that are often labeled as nonbelievers, or as religious "nones"? Following Lois Lee, we make use of the concept of nonreligion, which she defines as "anything which is primarily defined by a relationship of difference to religion."[3] Based on our own research projects, we argue that three types of lessons can be learned.

The first of these lessons concerns *what* we should be looking for. The problematic reflex to be fought here is that of tying (non)religion too closely to specific religious traditions. We cannot assume that dominant religious traditions of the past will provide the most relevant heuristic categories for the future. In addition to questioning the importance of religious affiliation, this also concerns the concept of belief and the related concept of (non)-believer. With their focus on the cognitive dimension of (non)religion, the categories of belief and (non)believer threaten to obfuscate other fundamental dimensions of (non)religion that scholars of religion have been studying over the past few decades. The second lesson concerns *where* our investigations should take place. We argue that diverse spaces such as hospitals, jails, cemeteries, and beach-side bars are crucial sites for future research. The third lesson, finally, concerns *how* we should be conducting our research. In

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[1] See Tomáš Halík, "West and East: Europe's Dual Experience," in this volume.

[2] See Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen, and Willem Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving. Diversiteit en verandering in beeld.* Deel 3: *Buiten kerk en moskee [Religion in a Pluriform Society. Diversity and Change in Pictures. Part 3: Outside Church and Mosque]* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2022), 10-16, quoted in Peter Jonkers, "'My Life is Absolutely Meaningless, But I Like It!' Responding to the Nonbelievers from a Christian Perspective," in this volume.

[3] Lois Lee, "Research Note: Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Non-religion Studies," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27, no. 1 (2012): 131, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2012.642742.

particular, we argue that the study of secularization and nonreligion requires new, empirically grounded, theoretical concepts and categories. To arrive there, traditional research methods such as surveys and interviews need to be combined with other innovative methods such as conversation analysis, photo-elicitation, online research, and digital ethnography. These latter methods enable the potential to grasp dimensions of meaning-making and finding other than just the cognitive dimension alone, and may better fit the sites where such data is collected.

In the next sections, we will illustrate how each of the three lessons follows from our own investigations into concrete manifestations of secularization in the Netherlands. As indicated, the questions of what, where, and how to investigate underpin these lessons. Along the way, it will become clear that both more quantitative and more qualitative research projects are needed if we want to understand better how those who are often described as religious nones or as nonbelievers make and find meaning.

Lesson One: What to Study

We start from three observations in Anke Liefbroer's research. We argue that if our goal is to develop new research projects that aim to map the ways in which so-called religious nones or nonbelievers make and find meaning in their lives, these projects should not rely overly much on suppositions derived from the study of existing religious traditions, such as the assumed primacy of matters of affiliation or belief.

First, in a study of clients receiving spiritual care in a hospital setting by chaplains from various religious traditions, Liefbroer and Ineke Nagel show that affiliating with the same religious tradition does not significantly relate to better client evaluations of spiritual care encounters.[4] In addition to questioning the importance of faith similarity for spiritual care, this finding questions the importance of religious affiliation as such for the way in which people make and find meaning in a secularized context like the Netherlands.

Second, in a study of the so-called "multiple religious belonging" of visitors to Dominican spiritual centers, Liefbroer, André Van der Braak, and Manuela Kalsky report that respondents who combine elements from various religious traditions in their lives draw from a variety of sources that are not only, or not necessarily, linked to religious traditions.[5] For instance, these

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[4] Anke I. Liefbroer and Ineke Nagel, "Does Faith Concordance Matter? A Comparison of Clients' Perceptions in Same versus Interfaith Spiritual Care Encounters with Chaplains in Hospitals," *Pastoral Psychology* 70, no. 4 (2021): 349-377, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-021-00947-4.

[5] Anke I. Liefbroer, André F.M. van der Braak, and Manuela Kalsky, "Multiple Religious Belonging among Visitors of Dominican Spiritual Centers in the Netherlands," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 33, no. 3 (2018): 407-426, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2018.1535362.

respondents place greater importance on sources such as nature, in-depth conversations, personal rituals or practices, and theological, philosophical, or spiritual texts (other than religious texts such as the Bible, the Qur'an, the Bhagavad Gita) than those who do not combine elements from various religious traditions. As such, this second study suggests that other aspects need to be addressed when studying the making and finding of meaning in a secularized context, and that these elements may include sources of meaning that are not linked exclusively to specific religious traditions.

Third, William Arfman's research into the emergence of a field of collective commemoration in the Netherlands has shown that what is at stake in the Dutch secularized context does not necessarily revolve around traditional doctrinal beliefs, or even around belief at all.[6] Comparing annual commemorations for the dead in Catholic, Protestant, and secular settings, it was social relations, emotions, experiences, and ritual practices that took center stage in all three settings rather than traditional matters of belief. An example from one of the secular commemorative projects will help to illustrate this point. In the longstanding art project *Allerzielen Alom* (All Souls All Around), artists, local funeral homes, and volunteers worked together to transform a cemetery into an open commemorative space for one autumnal evening. Visitors were invited to stroll around the beautifully illuminated cemetery, to encounter a variety of commemorative hotspots along the way.[7] For Ida van der Lee, the artist behind the project, the goal was to provide something meaningful to Dutch society without delving into particular principles of faith.[8] Underlining the relevance of her goals, survey research of visitors to *Allerzielen Alom* in 2007 showed that almost two-thirds (63.4%) of visitors were not religiously affiliated, the vast majority (93.6%) came primarily to commemorate the dead, and positive emotions and a feeling of togetherness dominated the visitors' experiences. In terms of afterlife beliefs, the idea of death as a total end was by and large rejected, although traditional religious perspectives were called into question as well. Instead, vague senses of continuity dominated.[9] Similarly, participant observation showed that no belief in a specific type of afterlife was assumed, or even encouraged, in the design of any of the ritual practices on offer. Instead, the emotional evocation of past social relations was employed ritually and materially by those designing the event so as to create symbolic experiences of continuity and discontinuity in a temporary community setting.[10] Here, too, we saw such

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[6] William R. Arfman, *Ritual Dynamics in Late Modernity: The Case of the Emerging Field of Collective Commemoration* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2014).

[7] Arfman, *Ritual Dynamics in Late Modernity*.

[8] Ida van der Lee, *De muze van het herdenken: Vijf jaar Allerzielen Alom* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2010).

[9] Eric Venbrux, Thomas Quartier, and William R. Arfman, "Het Nieuwe Allerzielen: Buitenkerkelijke Dodenherdenking en Religiositeit," in *De Dood Leeft! Wat betekent ons denken over leven na de dood voor ons leven vóór de dood*, eds. Gerlof Bosma and Charlotte van der Leest (Kampen: Kok, 2010), 195-210.

[10] Arfman, *Ritual Dynamics in Late Modernity*.

design goals reflected in the actual experiences of participants, who emphasized that, to them, the night had been primarily about commemoration of specific loved ones (evaluated as a 4.1 on a scale of 1 to 5), with two-thirds indicating that they experienced that night's connection to the deceased loved ones as intense to very intense.[11]

Taking the three observations from these cases together, it becomes apparent that traditional religious affiliations and beliefs were seemingly less important for understanding the making and finding of meaning than were non-traditional sources and non-cognitive dimensions of religion, such as the emotional ("bonding"), behavioral ("behaving"), and social ("belonging") dimensions.[12] We see here how language is at the heart of the research problem we are facing. As has become the dominant trend within the field of religious studies over the past half century,[13] a move away from one-dimensional understandings of religion is needed here as well. Rather than using terms referring to just the absence of one dimension of religiosity (e.g., "non-believer"), terms and concepts are needed that include nonreligiosity in all its forms. The aforementioned alternative category of religious "nones" has become increasingly popular, although it, too, is not without issue, given how it substitutes a focus on the absence of belief with an equally reductionist focus on the absence of affiliation.[14] What we seemingly need here, moving forward, are innovative new conceptualizations delineating the *what* of our research field.

One such possible conceptualization has been put forward by Arfman in a review of the most recent edition of the Dutch research project "God in Nederland" (God in the Netherlands).[15] Taking place roughly every ten years since 1966, this survey project has seen the addition of qualitative interviews, as well as the addition of questions on new spirituality and related matters. It could be argue that the most important development these new additions have brought to light is that a seemingly growing group of respondents is gravitating toward middle-of-the-road answers or "I do not know" options.[16] Referring to the Dutch classic sociological neologism of the "ietsist," or

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[11] Venbrux et al., "Het Nieuwe Allerzielen," 195-210.

[12] Vassilis Saroglou, "Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging: The Big Four Religious Dimensions and Cultural Variation," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 42, no. 8 (2011): 1320-1340, https://doi.org/10.1177/ 0022022111412267.

[13] Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (San Francisco, CA: Rand McNally, 1965); Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

[14] Glenn M. Vernon, "The Religious 'Nones': A Neglected Category," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 7, no. 2 (1968): 219-229, https://doi.org/10.2307/ 1384629.

[15] Anton P.J. Bernts and Joantine Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016).

[16] William R. Arfman, "De opkomst van de religieuze kweenies," *Leiden Religie Blog*, November 14, 2016, https://web.archive.org/web/20201204223736/https://lei denreligieblog.nl/articles/de-opkomst-van-de-religieuze-kweenies.

someone who believes vaguely that there is "something" (in Dutch: *iets)* out there, he coined the category of "kweenies" or, in English, "idunnos" (from: I don't know), to describe those who simply do not know what to make of religion, spirituality, and the like. Although this new conceptualization does open the door to new kinds of exploration of nonreligion, its focus on "knowing" again has a strong cognitive aim. Possibly more interesting, then, is a conceptualization stemming from Lee's call to study network-like "communities of practice," which we reference in more detail toward the end of the next section. Our own recurring use of the phrase "finding and making meaning" should also be seen in this light of searching for new conceptual language. Ultimately, however, this problem has not yet been solved.

Lesson Two: Where to Look

In considering *where* our future mapping projects on the making and finding of meaning in secularized contexts should take place, we argue that we should look for places outside of the standard congregational settings.[17] As seen in the first example above, one of these new types of places is the field of spiritual care or chaplaincy. Spiritual caregivers are often trained at theological seminaries or faculties to provide spiritual care. After being authorized or ordained by an institution affiliated with a specific religious or humanist tradition, they commonly work as formal representatives of that tradition.[18] Apart from these "affiliated" spiritual caregivers, there is, nowadays, an increase in "unaffiliated" spiritual caregivers in the Dutch context, or those who are working without any formal ordination or authorization from a religious or humanist organization.[19] Employed in secular settings such as hospitals, the military, and prisons, spiritual caregivers address the spiritual needs of clients from a variety of worldviews, both religious and secular.[20] As such, they are experts in discussing spiritual and existential themes in a

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[17] Wendy Cage, Peggy Levitt, and David Smilde, "De-Centering and Re-Centering: Rethinking Concepts and Methods in the Sociological Study of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 3 (2011): 437-449, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2011.01585.x.

[18] Ruard R. Ganzevoort, Mohamed Ajouaou, André F.M. van der Braak, Erik de Jongh, and Lourens Minnema, "Teaching Spiritual Care in an Interfaith Context," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 27, no. 2 (2014): 178-197, https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.v27i2.178.

[19] Hetty Zock, "Chaplaincy in the Netherlands. The Search for a Professional and a Religious Identity," *Tidsskrift for Praktisk Teologi: Nordic Journal of Practical Theology* 36, no. 2 (2019): 11-21, https://doi.org/10.48626 /tpt.v36i2.5347.

[20] Anke I. Liefbroer and Joantine Berghuijs, "Spiritual Care for Everyone? Personal and Organizational Differences in Interfaith Spiritual Care," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 25, no. 3 (2019): 110-129, https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2018.1556549.

secularized context.[21] Studying the content of their encounters and the practices they perform (e.g., rituals) when addressing clients' diverse needs may be a fruitful avenue for investigating how meaning is made and found in such contexts.

Arfman's research also puts new types of places into focus. Religious collective commemorations still take place predominantly in churches, but secular commemorations can be found in a whole range of locations. We already saw the examples of commemorative art projects taking place in cemeteries, but they were organized in local community centers as well. Other secular commemorations were held in town squares or in squatted churches, in nursing homes as well as in funeral homes, in museums and in concert halls, and even next to park lakes and in beach-side bars.[22] Of course, relevant research locations were not just limited to these (semi-) public spaces in which commemorations were actually held. Preparatory and evaluative meetings took place at the offices of the organizations involved, as well as at people's homes and through online channels. Online spaces can be seen to be important in this research as well. To a large extent, advertising of the commemorative events in question took place online, as did archiving them, in particular, through the sharing of experiences and photographs on social media.

Given the ever-increasing digitalization of our life worlds, it makes sense that these digital loci are becoming increasingly important as research sites, both when they constitute fully virtual spaces and when they complement physical ones. In currently ongoing research into how school children between the ages of 9 and 13 deal with being confronted with religion while visiting a museum of religious art, both of these manifestations are clearly visible. On the one hand, the museum makes use of an alternate reality game that blends the museum's physical exhibition with an interactive fictional storyline that is predominantly digital. On the other hand, it is evident in the reactions of the participating children that many of the sources they rely on in their attempts to grasp religious matters are from online spaces such as social media or computer gaming; for example, religious imagery is familiar to them from memes or games like Assassins Creed. It would be difficult to understand the life worlds of these school children if the digital spaces in which their lives are (partially) lived were to be ignored.

Studying the ways in which people make and find meaning in these various places reminds us of the call by Lee to study nonreligion among network-like associations of people who are not primarily connected because

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[21] Anke I. Liefbroer, Ruard R. Ganzevoort, and Erik Olsman, "Addressing the Spiritual Domain in a Plural Society: What Is the Best Mode of Integrating Spiritual Care into Healthcare?," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 22, no. 3 (2019): 244-260, https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2019.1590806.

[22] Arfman, *Ritual Dynamics in Late Modernity*.

of their intellectual stance[23] (which, again, would limit our focus to studying the cognitive dimension), but, rather, are connected and come together based on a shared experience as a "community of practice."[24] If our goal is to understand the ways in which meaning is made and found within these various communities of practice, then places such as those mentioned above should be taken seriously as contexts in which future mapping projects could take place. Traditional religious spaces are not to be ignored, of course, but they should be seen as only one type of research domain among many, some of which are physical and others digital.

Lesson Three: How to Study It

Our final lesson concerns the question of *how* to study the ways in which people make and find meaning. In line with Lee,[25] we argue that to account for the multidimensionality of nonreligion, research methods are needed that do not rely only on intellectual or cognitive forms of data, e.g., those derived from surveys and interviews. Based on our studies in the Dutch context, we suggest using other innovative methods, such as conversation analysis, photo- or object-elicitation, online research, and digital ethnography, to gain insights into emotional, social, and behavioral dimensions of nonreligion.

A first example of such a method is the study conducted by Liefbroer and Olsman regarding the ways in which spiritual caregivers deal with religious and spiritual diversity in their daily practice.[26] In addition to using quantitative surveys to investigate the perspectives of spiritual caregivers and clients on this issue,[27] this research specifically aimed to identify and compare the communication techniques spiritual caregivers use when addressing spiritual themes in their same- and interfaith conversations. To empirically study such conversations, audio-records of spiritual care encounters were collected, transcribed, and analyzed using conversation analysis. This method allowed the researchers to study the actual encounter in its (almost) natural occurrence, including the social interactions that take place when discussing spiritual and existential themes. This method may also be fruitful when studying the way in which nonreligious people interact with caregivers regarding spiritual and existential themes.

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[23] Lois Lee, "Locating Nonreligion, in Mind, Body and Space: New Research Methods for a New Field," in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: Volume 3: New Methods in the Sociology of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 142-145, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047429470_008.

[24] Lee, "Locating Nonreligion," 143.

[25] Lee, "Locating Nonreligion," 135-157.

[26] Anke I. Liefbroer and Erik Olsman, "Spiritual Talk: Addressing Existential Themes in Interfaith Encounters," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 24, no. 2 (2020): 252-272, https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2019-0021.

[27] Liefbroer and Berghuijs, "Spiritual care for everyone?," 110-129; Liefbroer and Nagel, "Does faith concordance matter?," 349-377.

A second method that may prove useful for studying nonreligion is interviewing while using photo- or object-elicitation. In an ongoing study by Liefbroer, she and her colleagues are investigating the way in which nonreligious young adults make and find meaning by conducting semi-structured interviews. Since many people may find it difficult to express their meaning-making and -finding verbally, the researchers are using photographs to assist respondents in describing this.[28] Arfman has also used object-elicitation in his studies to encourage artists to discuss their meaning-making practices on the level of materiality rather than on the cognitive level, which is where questions into meaning otherwise tend to lead.[29]

A third example can be found in an early stage of Arfman's project on collective commemoration. To identify larger transformations in the period from the 1990s to the 2010s, a database of collective commemorations had to be created.[30] Most data for this database was acquired through online research into three types of websites: websites hosting relevant event calendars, websites of relevant news outlets, and, most labor-intensive, the individual websites of organizing communities of practice such as churches, funeral homes, and artist collectives. Sites were identified through a snowballing set of archived Google search strings. Where information was missing online, additional information was sought through e-mail communication. Possibilities for digital research do not end here, of course. During the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, Arfman had students in a research training course make use of an approach called digital ethnography,[31] a methodology revolving around participant observation in online spaces such as livestreams, Facebook groups, YouTube comments, or Reddit discussions. One important heuristic benefit of taking existing methodologies into online spaces is that doing so not only opens up new spaces of inquiry, as detailed above, but these adaptations also allow for the study of new practices of mediation.[32] The websites of nonreligious *Allerzielen Alom* commemorations, for example, tended to become platforms for poetically staking out precisely those relationships

[28] Michael F. Steger, Yerin Shim, Brenna R. Rush, Libby A. Brueske, Joo Y. Shin, and Leslie A. Merriman, "The Mind's Eye: A Photographic Method for Understanding Meaning in People's Lives," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 8, no. 6 (2013): 530-342, https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2013.830760.

[29] William R. Arfman, "Innovating from Traditions: The Emergence of a Ritual Field of Collective Commemoration in the Netherlands," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 1 (2014): 17-32, https://doi.org/ 10.1080/13537903.2014.864799; William R. Arfman, "A Monument for Boat Refugees: Ritual and the Art of Liminality," in *Cultural Practices of Victimhood*, eds. M. Hoondert, P. Mutsaers, and W. Arfman (London: Routledge, 2018), 39-54, https://doi.org/10.4324/978131514 8335.

[30] Arfman, "Innovating from Traditions."

[31] See P. Varis, "Digital Ethnography," *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies* 104 (2014), https://research. tilburguniversity.edu/files/30479758/TPCS_104_Varis.pdf.

[32] Birgit Meyer, *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence: Towards a Material Approach to Religion* (Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht, Faculteit Geesteswten-schappen, 2012).

of difference that Lois Lee made central in her aforementioned definition of nonreligion.[33]

Taking these various methodological experiences in the Dutch context into consideration, we argue that new projects studying nonreligion require new and innovative combinations of quantitative and qualitative research methods, such as combining document analysis, surveys, interviews, and traditional participant observation with conversation analysis, photo- or object-elicitation, online research, and digital ethnography.

Concluding Remarks

Summarizing the above, we can state that three potentially useful lessons can be learned from the Dutch situation. The first of these concerns the content of what is to be studied. From the research projects discussed, it becomes apparent that matters of belief and nonbelief cannot be studied separate from complex emotions, meaningful practices, non-ordinary experiences, and social relations. Language and concepts are needed to ensure these various dimensions are addressed when studying nonreligion. The second lesson concerns the places where research is to take place. Here, we can see that even when considering only a small selection of research projects, a whole range of spaces are identified where the making and finding of meaning takes place outside of congregational settings. The third and final lesson concerns the methods employed to acquire data. Complex new situations require new combinations of approaches, including combining qualitative and quantitative methods, and using digital ones.

Taking these three lessons together, our final position is this: if our goal is to understand how meaning is made or found in various contemporary (non)religious communities of practice today, then innovation is needed regarding the conceptual language we use, the places we explore, and the methodology we use in doing so.

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[33] Arfman, *Ritual Dynamics in Late Modernity*.

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"My life is absolutely meaningless, but I like it!" Responding to Nonbelievers from a Christian Perspective

PETER JONKERS

Introduction

The quote that serves as the title of this chapter, stemming from an interview with a nonbeliever,[1] is an excellent illustration of the attitude of many people today towards questions about meaning in life. It shows that they are not interested in discussions about an encompassing meaning of life, be it of a religious or a secular stripe. Rather, just like the life they lead, they are happy with its everyday pleasures and do not care about (broader) meaning of life issues. This attitude is anything but marginal given that the number of nonbelievers has risen substantially in the last decades: in 2018, atheists and agnostics made up more than 40% of the population of all North-Western European countries (the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, France, Denmark, and the United Kingdom). In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the number of nonreligious currently even make up the majority of the population.[2] These observations are the starting point of this chapter and will be analyzed below in more detail. These findings seriously complicate answering the leading question of this paper, namely: How to respond to nonbelievers from a Christian perspective?

According to José Casanova, nonbelievers can be subdivided into three different categories: a) unaffiliated religious, b) spiritual not religious, or individual spiritual seekers, and c) nonbelievers proper, a group that includes reflexive agnostics, secular humanists, and atheists, as well as simply unreflexive nonbelievers.[3] The first group consists of people who have broken away from their national churches without affiliating themselves to alternative religious communities, but still consider themselves religious. This is why Grace Davie has famously qualified these people as "believing without

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[1] Quoted in Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen, and Willem Huijnk, *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving. Diversiteit en verandering in beeld.* Deel 3: *Buiten kerk en moskee [Religion in a Pluriform Society. Diversity and Change in Pictures. Part 3: Outside Church and Mosque]* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2022), 121.

[2] The graph underpinning these observations stems from the International Social Survey Programme '91-'18 and can be found in Grace Davie, "Reflections on Noreligion and Nonbelief in Europe: Typology or Spectrum," in this volume.

[3] See José Casanova, "Conditions of Belief and Nonbelief in Our Global Secular Age," in this volume.

belonging."[4] It needs to be noted that the depth and extent of the beliefs of the unaffiliated religious are rather low: those who profess belief in a personal God, who pray with some regularity, and who claim to have had some personal religious experiences but are nevertheless not church-members, are a small minority in most West European countries. This fact shows that, after these people have given up their belonging to a religious community, their belief gradually fades as well.[5] The second group has a relative openness toward some form of transcendence, which may have the most diverse expressions, both religious as well as semi-religious: one can think of the seekers of individual paths of self-expression and people who are attuned to various paths of Eastern mysticism, such as yoga or Buddhist meditation. Self-spirituality, which forms the largest subcategory in this group, stands for broadening one's mind, striving for more sensitivity and intuitive reactions, and finding a better balance between mind and body.[6] The third group is the largest in North-Western Europe; it includes not only the traditional reflexive agnostics, atheists, and secular humanists, but also the rapidly increasing group of unreflexive nonbelievers, that is, those who experience living without religion as a taken-for-granted reality,[7] as the quote in the title of this chapter already exemplified.

Hence, unreflexive nonbelief has become the normal, modern human condition, the new norm, that which just is and does not have to justify itself.[8] Whereas during the last decades of the previous century the decrease in traditional religiosity was still partly compensated by a revival of the interest in alternative spiritualities, this trend turned out to be only temporary. The most recent empirical findings show that belief in a vital force or an indefinable spirit is diminishing too, thus strengthening the normalization of nonreli-

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[4] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

[5] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 19; see also Staf Hellemans, "Imagining the Catholic Church in a World of Seekers," in *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, eds. Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 134. Davie also observes that as religious practice (belonging) drops, this is accompanied by a noticeable drift from what might be termed orthodox believing to increasingly heterodox ideas. See Davie, "Reflections on Noreligion and Nonbelief in Europe."

[6] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 49. See also Peter Jonkers, "Serving the World Through Wisdom: Revitalizing Wisdom Traditions in Christian Faith," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, eds. Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), 82-84. Hellemans interprets the phenomenon of self-spirituality as a manifestation of the dissolution of the religious field as a whole. See Staf Hellemans, "The Great Transformation of Religion and of the Catholic Church," in this volume.

[7] Casanova, "Conditions of Belief and Nonbelief."

[8] Linda Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain: the emergence of a new cultural majority," *Journal of the British Academy* 4 (2016): 259-260.

gion.[9] Another factor that makes the group of (un)reflexive nonbelievers likely to increase further is that the transmission of faith from parents to children is declining. Every new generation turns out to be less religious than the previous one.[10] Apparently, secular networks are far more successful than churches in socializing large parts of the population.[11]

Considering the rapid growth of the nonbelievers or the nones, that is, those who tick the box "no religion" or "none" in sociological surveys, it is timely to investigate the beliefs of these people in more detail. To do so, the next section comprises a summary of some recent sociological studies on nonbelievers, thereby focusing on their existential culture. For reasons of feasibility, this overview will be limited to studies in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In the third section, I will examine whether the existential culture of the nones can be connected in a meaningful way to the tradition of Christian wisdom.

The Beliefs of Nonbelievers

Various elements have been put forward to explain the rise of the nonbelievers. According to Charles Taylor, modern nonbelief is the consequence of people living in a closed immanent frame, marked by the conviction that this period of history has overcome a previous, religious condition. Especially in Western Europe, people think that they can only come of age by leaving behind the irrationality of belief.[12] Peter Berger points to another factor to explain the rise of nonbelief, namely, cultural pluralization, which consists of the twin pluralisms of religious diversity and religious/secular diversity. These pluralisms have undermined taken-for-granted cognitive frameworks and traditions. In contexts of diversity, it becomes harder for religion to be an unquestioned part of culture. Cultural diversity does not necessarily lead to

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[9] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 16f., 132ff.

[10] Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 247, 249. See also Grace Davie, "Religion, Secularity, and Secularization in Europe," in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe*, eds. Grace Davie and Lucian N. Leustean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 278.

[11] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 141 and Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 249.

[12] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 28, 589 and Charles Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," in *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*, eds. Charles Taylor, José Casanova, George F. McLean, and João J. Vila-Chã (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016), 270. Grace Davie convincingly argues that this explanation makes secularization a typically (West-)European phenomenon, closely connected to its history. Therefore, Europe is not secular because it is modern but because it is European. See Davie, "Religion, Secularity, and Secularization in Europe," 268-284.

religious decline, but it places new pressures on religious institutions, which can no longer depend on affiliation by default or religious identity through ascription but rather through choice.[13] A final explanatory factor for the rising numbers of nonbelievers is the liberalization of society, in which every individual has the right to make choices about how one should live one's own life. In all Western societies, there is a massive moral consensus about the importance of individual freedom of choice, and this has created a value gap with the more conservative stance of most churches on moral issues. In sum, the dominance of radical, individual self-determination explains why many people, especially the younger generation, find that religion is unable to offer the social, spiritual, and moral goods that they affirm and desire.[14]

Turning towards the content of the beliefs of the nonbelievers, a preliminary remark needs to be made: it was, for a long time, common practice among sociologists of religion to define this group in negative terms, as the counterpart of the (religious) believers, or as a sort of demographic dustbin category created to contain those who no longer fit the religious pigeonholes.[15] To correct this view, social researchers have recently started to use the terms nones and nonreligious to refer to them. This designation means that nonreligion is not a category imposed on people by social researchers but is made and performed by the nones in their everyday lives.[16] Hence, nonreligious phenomena are, nowadays, ever more treated as real, substantive social facts in their own right (a presence) and not simply as an absence of religious practice or belief.[17] Nonreligion has thus become the secular equivalent of lived religion. In other words, nonreligious people are measured less by their distance from traditional religiosity but more by focusing on what they have moved towards.[18]

Given that individual freedom and self-determination are the most important values among most Western people, and especially among the nones,[19] it is no surprise that their beliefs are very diverse. The nones reject

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[13] Peter Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Towards a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014). Quoted in Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 254f. See also Hans Joas, "The Church in a World of Options," in *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*, 85-96 and Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," 269.

[14] Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 255-258. See also Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," 271f. and De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 137.

[15] Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 258. See also Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious. Reimagining the Secular* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 51.

[16] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 132.

[17] Josh Bullock and Stephen Bullivant, "Non-religion and Europe," in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Europe*, eds. Grace Davie and Lucian N. Leustean, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 553.

[18] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 13f., 52.

[19] Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 251f.

being labeled either by religious categories or by secular ones, so nonreligion is a spectrum rather than a typology that could define a specific group.[20] Hence, the nonreligious cannot be conflated with the secularism championed by New Atheists like Richard Dawkins.[21] The largest group of the nones is made up of maybes, doubters, and don't-knows. Some of them take part in religious or spiritual practices, like praying, lighting a candle, and going to a church to meditate, but they certainly do not participate in *communal* religious practices (e.g., worshiping) and are indifferent toward religious leaders, institutions, and authorities.[22] Therefore, to capture the wide diversity of the (non)religious landscape, we have to unsettle the binary religion/nonreligion approach.[23]

Furthermore, to interpret nonreligious phenomena in their own right, it is important to understand them as they appear in the everyday lives of the nones because, as will become apparent below, their existential culture is implicit and incarnated. In other words, we should not concentrate so much on the explicit, discursive, and theoretically well-founded accounts – as given, e.g., by the New Atheists. Far more influential are the banal, implicit, material forms and unreflexive or taken-for-granted cultures of the nonreligious, represented in various ways in the public sphere. They play an important role in the reproduction of cultural norms by acting as quiet reminders of these norms.[24] A striking example of such a reproduction of nonreligious normativity happened during the Covid-19 pandemic: mainstream media, followed by the majority of public opinion, showed a complete incomprehension about religious people's need to go to church despite the lockdowns. They considered faith just an opinion, which one can change at will; whereas for the faithful themselves, it is an inherent aspect of their identity, to which they want to testify in their church as a sacred place.[25] Other expressions of the nonreligious in the public domain are commercials that slightly ridicule popular religious expressions to promote a product, or nonreligious images and slogans (e.g., a t-shirt with an image of Jesus and the Sacred Heart and the slogan "Football Is My Religion," with the Sacred Heart replaced by a football). Other manifestations of the nonreligious, which caused quite a stir,

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[20] Davie, "Reflections on Noreligion and Nonbelief in Europe." See also Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 36.

[21] Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 249f.

[22] Woodhead, "The rise of 'no religion' in Britain," 250, 258. See also Nicola Madge and Peter J. Hemming, "Young British Religious 'Nones': Findings from the Youth on Religion Study," *Journal of Youth Studies* 20, no. 7 (2017): 880. Quoted in Davie, "Reflections on Noreligion and Nonbelief in Europe."

[23] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 37.

[24] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 71-72.

[25] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 145. Obviously, this incomprehension also concerned Jews who wanted to go to the synagogue, and Muslims, who wanted to pray in the mosque.

are irreverent pictures of Muhammed in Western media.[26] Mundane manifestations of the nonreligious in a domestic context are postcards and other images light-heartedly ridiculing religion. This "attention to implicit forms of nonreligion alerts us to the ways in which it penetrates deep into the ordinary and the prosaic, constituting and re-constituting a nonreligious culture."[27] These examples, as well as the spread of various nonreligious birth, wedding, and funeral ceremonies, show that "the apparently post-religious is transformed, from an expression of emptiness and shallowness into an expression of deep embeddedness,"[28] in other words, from something negative into something positive.

These insights contradict the widespread view that the nonreligious, after having left their religious community, experience an existential void, which they try to fill with alternative spiritualities, thus turning them into (active) seekers after a deeper meaning in life.[29] A related assumption, which is also belied by these findings, is that the nonreligious are, in principle, prepared to transform the direction of their seeking from horizontal to vertical transcendence. This is one of the conclusions of Taylor's outstanding work, *A Secular Age.* In a chapter devoted to the prospects of religion today, he defends the thesis that the secular ideal of wholeness and personal authenticity can be transformed rather easily into the Christian one of holiness.[30] According to Taylor, many of today's nonbelievers, who are living in the immanent order of modernity, are seekers after a deeper meaning in life, who want to break out of this framework because they sense that there are realities

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[26] This shows that the anti-Christian view has gradually become more acceptable since the last decades of the twentieth century in a way that anti-Islamic slogans have not (see Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 78). To explain this difference, one can point to the fact that Muslims identify far more with their religion than Christians and, therefore, protest more vehemently against irreverence and blasphemy (90% of the Muslims in the Netherlands find their religion an important aspect of their life; see De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 139, 143). Furthermore, Muslims are a small but growing minority in an ever more secular Dutch society, which means that the ideas and practices of the latter clash with those of the former. Consequently, Muslims experience a so-called minority-stress, making them more likely to stand up for their faith against main-stream society (see De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 144f.). A similar phenomenon can be observed among conservative Christians; see De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]* and Davie, "Reflections on Noreligion and Non-belief in Europe."

[27] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 81. In her book, Lee gives numerous examples of domestic and public manifestations of the mundane nonreligious and other expressions of nonreligion through people's clothing, their relation to their bodies after death, the appropriation of religious buildings for nonreligious ends, etc.

[28] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 85.

[29] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 16.

[30] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 510.

beyond the immanent frame which cannot simply be denied.[31] This view about nonbelievers also formed the backbone of the large international research project, *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age*.[32] In my own contributions to this project, I also took this view of nonbelievers.[33] However, it turns out that most nones are not actively searching at all, especially not after vertical transcendence and only sporadically after a horizontal one, as will be shown in the next section. They are happy with their nonreligious lives and have a distaste for talking about religious or nonreligious issues or cultures with their family or friends. Their attitude appears "to be bound up with the banality and hiddenness of nonreligious cultural forms, meaning that these forms are neither subjected to as much critical attention as they deserve nor made visible in a way that would help people develop articulated self-understandings and know where to turn for social and symbolic resources when they need them."[34] The nones have social structures and networks of their own but these are often rather informal, implicit, and piecemeal, thus confirming the sense of nonreligion as mundane, tacit, and taken-for-granted. In this light, the nonreligious cannot be regarded as active seekers after a deeper meaning in life, let alone as people willing to make the transi-tion from horizontal to vertical transcendence.

Yet, if traditional (non)religious categories do not apply univocally to the overall majority of the nones, the question is what are their existential cultures? In other words, how do they give meaning to their lives? First of all, in line with the predominantly mundane, everyday nature of all (religious and nonreligious) existential cultures, one has to keep in mind that people become involved in them for all sorts of reasons (e.g., economic, social, emotional, political, etc.) and only incidentally on intellectual grounds – philosophical or theological (in the case of religious existential cultures).[35] Lee distinguishes five empirically grounded types of existential cultures: humanist, agnostic, theist, subjectivist, and anti-existential.[36] As already noted above, this typology should not be considered a clearcut classification but, rather, a spectrum with a considerable overlap between different types. Focusing on the nonreligious, the overall majority of them, and, hence, a substantial part of society at large, take an anti-existential attitude towards meaning in life issues. The term 'anti-existential' should not be understood condescendingly,

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[31] Taylor, "The Church Speaks – to Whom?," in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, eds. Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), 22.

[32] Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," 275-281.

[33] See Peter Jonkers, "From Rational Doctrine to Christian Wisdom. A Possible Response of the Church to Today's Seekers," in *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, 163-191 and Peter Jonkers, "A Serving Church: Overcoming Polarization Through Wisdom," in *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*, 229-252.

[34] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 158, see also 108, 116.

[35] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 160-161.

[36] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 162-172.

as if the nones lack an existential culture. Rather, in comparison with religious and atheist people, the culture of the nones is more implicit and mundane, rejecting all explicit existential philosophies and cultures in general. Like most other people, the nones have firm existential commitments but do not theoretically reflect on them. Rather, they prefer to use everyday language and concrete problems or situations to express their existential positions.[37] They also make thoughtful decisions about what rituals to use to express their existential positions, weighing up these issues with their family, and concerning national and other traditions;[38] but they refuse to identify themselves with any of them. In other words, the existential culture of the nones emphasizes the immediate – everyday needs, responsibilities, and pleasures. When it comes to ethical issues, they attend to them intuitively and pragmatically, according to immediate rather than abstract concerns. Their existential and ethical concerns are incarnated in diverse and discrete symbolic forms, social formations, and everyday ethics, involved not only in consolidating moral codes but expressed in embodied ethics.[39] To summarize, the anti-existential existential culture of the nones "is a part of daily life, not in the abstract, but in direct and indirect experiences of birth, death, and ill-health, and in the ethical decisions [they] make about the value of human life in responses to an array of personal and political issues such as abortion, euthanasia, murder, and war."[40]

A very recent (2022), large-scale (more than 4000 participants) empirical investigation into the unaffiliated religious, the individual spiritual seekers, and the (unreflexive) nonreligious in the Netherlands confirms and details the above insights.[41] First of all, the ongoing individualization and subjectivation of all existential cultures means that people are far less attached to an encompassing meaning *of* life provided by one of the major religious (or secular) traditions, and have replaced these with construing a wide variety of meanings *in* life. The basic attitude of the nonreligious is one of expressive individualism, which means that they follow their own inner voice, develop their individual capacities, and combine wise insights from various (religious) traditions that are appealing to them during certain phases of their lives. Given the dominance of the so-called ethics of authenticity in the whole Western world, "according to which each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity […] as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside,"[42] it is no surprise that this eclectic

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[37] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 174.

[38] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 181.

[39] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 184.

[40] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 171-172.

[41] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*.

[42] See Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 475; see also Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

attitude has not only been adopted by the nones but also by a growing part of the churchgoers.[43]

Although the nonreligious are hardly interested in theoretical exposés about meaning in life, let alone about the meaning *of* life, or in discussions about existential culture,[44] they are, like everyone else, confronted with existential issues on concrete occasions. After all, being able to give meaning to one's life is an essential part of mental well-being. Recent research has shown that meaning in life emerges "from the web of connections, interpretations, aspirations, and evaluations that (1) make our experiences comprehensible, (2) direct our efforts to desired futures, and (3) provide a sense that our lives matter and are worthwhile."[45]

Apart from their apparent lack of interest in *discussions about* meaning of/in life, the Dutch research also shows that the nonreligious *experience* less meaning in life than the (un)affiliated religious and the (individual) spiritual seekers, especially regarding the third dimension of meaning in life. This positive effect of religion on the experience that our lives matter and are worthwhile is also confirmed by international studies.[46] Generally speaking, the nonreligious focus on happiness rather than on meaning in life, although this difference should not be exaggerated, since the two are closely connected: a happy life is a meaningful one and vice versa. Yet, the Dutch research points to an intriguing, empirically corroborated difference between the two: happiness, defined as subjective wellbeing, centers around the satisfaction of present needs, whereas meaning in life is a matter of integrating past, present, and future. In other words, thinking about the past and the future increases the feeling of meaning in life but correlates negatively with happiness, which is more orientated toward the present. Furthermore, while *receiving help from others* increases one's own happiness, *giving support to others* is important for experiencing meaning in life.[47] The most probable explanation of this difference is that questions about meaning in life require the interviewees to reflect upon their lives from a broader perspective, which is not the cup of tea of the nonreligious, whose prime focus is the present. Put briefly, the nonreligious emphasize the importance of individual happiness

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[43] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 140f., 147f.

[44] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 60f.

[45] Frank Martela and Michael F. Steger, "The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 11, no. 5 (2016): 531-545.

[46] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 81.

[47] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 87f. In this context, the authors refer to Roy Baumeister, Kathleen Vohs, Jennifer Lyn Aaker, and Emily Garbinski, "Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 8, no. 6 (2013): 505-516.

without too much searching after a broader horizon of meaning, be it horizontal or vertical, immanent or transcendent.[48]

Yet, the nonreligious do not experience their relative lack of meaning in life as a deficiency. Rather, they consider it not very important. The quote in the title of this chapter, "my life is absolutely meaningless, but I like it,"[49] illustrates this attitude. Keeping in mind that the difference between meaning in life and happiness is relative because they are closely connected for all people, this difference can be summarized as follows:

> The unhappy but meaningful life [is] seriously involved in difficult undertakings. It [is] marked by ample worry, stress, argument, and anxiety. People with such lives spend much time thinking about past and future: They expect to do a lot of deep thinking, they imagine future events, and they reflect on past struggles and challenges. [People with a] highly happy but relatively meaningless life […] seem rather carefree, lacking in worries and anxieties. If they argue, they do not feel that arguing reflects them. Interpersonally, they are takers rather than givers, and they devote little thought to past and future.[50]

However, even though the nonreligious are not interested in questions about meaning in life, they are inevitably confronted with existential questions at pivotal moments in life (birth, ill-health, death, misfortune, poverty, war, etc.). In situations like these, it turns out that their individualized and piecemeal answers to these questions come at a cost. As Lee has shown, because of the hidden and implicit character of their existential culture, the nones are not well versed in developing articulated self-understandings and do not know where to turn for social and symbolic resources when they need them.[51] Moreover, because their individual biography has become the sole criterion of meaning, the nones have to find out the answers to existential questions alone, without the support of meaning-giving institutions, traditions, and practices that could offer orientation to their answers. This lack of support and orientation confronts the nonreligious with a heavier existential burden when faced with meaning in life questions. In other words, the flip side of the current ideal of expressive individualism is the fading of stabilizing structures, which could give the nonreligious something to hold on to. Yet, as Taylor has convincingly argued, our identity is always shaped through (the recognition by) significant others and against the background of

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[48] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 89.

[49] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 121.

[50] Baumeister et al., "Some key differences between a happy and a meaningful life," 515.

[51] Lee, *Recognizing the Nonreligious*, 158, see also 108, 116.

inescapable horizons of meaning and value.[52] Ignoring these identity-constituting elements has detrimental effects on one's mental health, as becomes manifest from the growing number of burnout and related mental illnesses.[53] This underpins the above observation of the close connection between happiness and meaning in life: a life entirely focused on individual happiness is, sooner or later, confronted with the need to situate present happiness against a broader horizon of meaning, which also includes the past and the future. Even though Taylor's claim about the willingness of the nonbelievers to make the transition from horizontal to vertical transcendence can be criticized on good empirical grounds, his argument that broader horizons of meaning and value are essential for a (religious as well as nonreligious) human existence remains unimpaired.

Responding to Nonbelievers from a Christian Perspective

The above analysis of the existential culture of nonbelievers has made clear that it is not at all evident how to respond to them constructively from a Christian perspective. First of all, the beliefs of the nones and their relation to Christian faith are very diverse; they choose elements from various religious and secular traditions that suit them best, but they refuse to identify themselves with any of these traditions. Moreover, the nonreligious only occasionally pay attention to meaning in life issues because they focus on a happy rather than a meaningful life. Hence, they are not actively seeking an encompassing meaning *of* life, let alone spirituality and vertical transcendence. In short, because the existential culture of the nonreligious is predominantly mundane, implicit, and pragmatic, a popular way to connect them with the spiritual and encompassing meaning-giving dimensions of Christian faith has lost a great deal of the traction, which still was around at the turn of this century. This approach, in which Taylor and many others had put their hopes, rested on the assumption that the nones would remain interested in these aspects of Christian faith after their farewell to organized religion.

If Christianity aims to be a relevant voice in today's mainstream society, it needs to find alternative ways to connect with the nonreligious. This is all the more urgent because "there is a discernible if gradual shift away from […] a public utility model of religious provision (i.e. the parochially organized historic churches) towards a way of working that is more like a market" in a turbulent and competitive field.[54] Also, the idea of vicarious religion, namely,

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[52] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 35.

[53] De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 147.

[54] Davie, "Religion, Secularity, and Secularization in Europe," 279-280; De Hart et al., *Religie in een pluriforme samenleving [Religion in a Pluriform Society]*, 139; Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers, "Reforming the Catholic Church beyond Vatican II," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, 1; Staf Hellemans, "Will the Catholic

the appreciation by the general public of what the churches are doing even though the majority of the population does not participate in their activities, has become under pressure and is no longer a guarantee for the future of the churches.[55]

Against this background, a possible alternative for connecting with the nonreligious from a Christian perspective, which I want to develop in this paper, is to see whether Christian wisdom, as an expression of life-orientating knowledge, can relieve the existential burden of the nones. Well-known examples of Christian wisdom are the books of Job and Proverbs, the stories about Solomon, the parable of the Good Samaritan, individual sayings of Jesus, the lives of saints, etc. There are several reasons to explore this possibility in more detail. First, the expressions of Christian wisdom are quite diverse and often embedded in concrete stories, which makes them less massive and more mundane than other aspects of Christian faith. Therefore, they may be more relevant to the nonreligious since their existential culture is also rather implicit and embedded in everyday life. The added value, so to speak, of Christian wisdom is that it offers the nonreligious a broader life-orientation than their just focusing on their individual biography and the pursuit of (instantaneous) happiness, even though this broadening is a horizontal one. Furthermore, expressions of Christian wisdom continue to be incarnated in the cultural heritage of the West as one of its formative elements,[56] which makes these expressions recognizable to the nonreligious.

Yet, Christians have good reasons to mistrust this way of connecting with the nonreligious. Christian wisdom is essentially God-centered, has the whole of creation as its context, is immersed in history and the contemporary world, and is constantly sought afresh with others in a community whose basic trust is that the Spirit will lead them into further truth. Since Christians believe that Jesus is God's only son, he is not only a teacher of Godly wisdom (the title by which he is most frequently addressed and referred to in the New Testament) but he is also wisdom incarnate, a theological claim regarding Jesus that first appeared within the early history of the transmission and development of the traditions about Jesus.[57] Jesus's wisdom points to a transcendental reality discerned only by faith and in the context of obedient discipleship. Christian wisdom is thus not primarily a matter of life-orientating knowledge and a horizontal broadening of existential horizons; rather, it is a manifestation of the hidden life of God made known in the life,

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Church Remain Relevant? The Evolution of its Offer after 1800," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church,* 65; Hellemans, "The Great Transformation of Religion and of the Catholic Church."

[55] Davie, "Reflections on Noreligion and Nonbelief in Europe."

[56] Davie, "Religion, Secularity, and Secularization in Europe," 277.

[57] James D.G. Dunn, "Jesus: Teacher of Wisdom or Wisdom Incarnate?," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 79, 83.

death, and resurrection of the Son of God,[58] which highlights the radically vertical character of the Christian idea of transcendence.

The divine character of Christian wisdom explains why Paul is so critical of its opposite, namely, all manifestations of human or worldly wisdom – a critique that also applies to the existential culture of today's nonreligious. He qualifies all worldly wisdom as folly in the eyes of God, and stresses its fundamental difference from Christian wisdom, which is the only true wisdom for Christians. Thus, only by believing wholeheartedly in the story of Jesus and accepting that one's whole life is reframed by it, can one become open to the revelation of God's wisdom, which is a necessary condition for leading a truly wise life.[59] The essence of Paul's insight is that divine wisdom rests on a relation of vertical transcendence between the world and God, which he opposes to the horizontal transcendence of worldly wisdom, that is, of taking a step back from the here and now and looking at the world from a broader perspective. This explains why some Christians may think that the attempt, made in this paper, to reach out to the nonreligious by linking their mundane ideas and practices about meaning in life to divine wisdom is doomed to fail.

However, if Christian faith aims to be a worthwhile discussion partner for the nonreligious, I am afraid that there is no viable alternative, given the dominance of worldly wisdom in our times. An example of the viability of this approach is the pastoral care offered in hospitals during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this unprecedented situation, healthcare chaplains put into practice Pope Francis' well-known proposal to see the Church as a field hospital. By this metaphor, the Pope meant "that the Church should not remain in splendid isolation from the world, but should break free of its boundaries and give help where people are physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually afflicted."[60] When the pandemic broke out, healthcare staff felt completely overwhelmed because of the enormous number of people admitted to hospitals and the high death toll. Worse still, because of the extremely strict quarantine measures in hospitals, neither healthcare staff nor patients' relatives could comfort the critically ill in their final hours. The inability of being present, touching, and sharing spiritual experiences with patients and families impacted healthcare chaplains. Yet, they showed much flexibility and creativity in developing new ways to assist people in extreme existential need: they started to use digital technologies to connect with and provide care to patients and their families, developed novel ways of digital and print communications, served as intermediaries between patients and loved ones, and

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[58] Stephen C. Barton, "Gospel Wisdom," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, 108f.

[59] Richard B. Hays, "Wisdom According to Paul," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, 122f. See also Colin Gunton, "Christ, the Wisdom of God: A Study in Divine and Human Action," in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, 260.

[60] Tomáš Halík, "Christianity in a Time of Sickness," in this volume.

introduced new end-of-life rituals.[61] Chaplains also offered highly appreci-
ated support to healthcare staff, many of whom were on the verge of burnout:
they placed positive messages around the hospital and, in many settings,
created videos, social media posts, and/or thank you notes to share, thus offer-
ing encouragement and food for thought to healthcare staff.[62]

The initiatives of healthcare chaplains during the pandemic illustrate
their flexibility and creativity in adapting their expertise to the needs and the
concrete situations of the people they cared for, most of whom were non-
religious. Healthcare chaplains do their work from a Christian inspiration, but
their vocational identity goes together with a professional identity, which
gives them the necessary creativity and flexibility to adapt their expertise to
unprecedented situations and to the existential needs of people. Because of
their combined identity, healthcare chaplains realized that they had to put
these needs first. As a result, they were able to connect well with the implicit
and mundane existential needs of the nonreligious. Typically, the nones are
not interested in (theoretical discussions about) meaning in life and even less
in encompassing (religious) meaning *of* life stories and rituals; however, they
do have, just like everyone else, existential needs, which crop up occasionally
and in a piecemeal way in their everyday lives. In other words, despite their
focus on present happiness, the nonbelievers are, from time to time, con-
fronted with the need to situate their lives against a broader horizon of mean-
ing and value simply because happiness and meaning in life are closely con-
nected. Hence, it is no surprise that the words and actions of the healthcare
chaplains, stemming from their combined vocational and professional iden-
tity, were highly appreciated by religious and nonreligious people alike. This
shows that the relation between divine and worldly wisdom is less opposi-
tional than Paul argued since visiting the sick is not only one of the Christian
works of mercy but also a contribution to realizing the good life for all people.

From this perspective, it is worthwhile to examine whether the work of
healthcare chaplains can indeed be considered an exemplification of practical
wisdom, and whether the characteristics of the latter can shed some light on
the work of the former. According to Aristotle, practical wisdom is "a true
and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to human goods that are good
or bad for man," not in some particular respect, "but about what sorts of things
conduce to the good life in general."[63] Because practical wisdom aims to offer
a truthful orientation to concrete actions and contingent situations, it relates
the insights of theoretical knowledge about general laws and principles with

[61] Anne Vandenhoeck, Cheryl Holmes, Cate Michelle Desjardins, and Joost
Verhoef, "'The Most Effective Experience Was a Flexible and Creative Attitude':
Reflections on Those Aspects of Spiritual Care That Were Lost, Gained, or Deemed
Ineffective During the Pandemic," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 75
(2021): 17-23.

[62] Beta Tata, Daniel Nuzum, Karen Murphy, Leila Karimi, and Wendy Cage, "Staff-
Care by Chaplains during Covid-19," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 75
(2021): 24-29.

[63] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI 5, 1140a27-28, 1140b5-8.

an assessment of their impact upon different contingent situations and human temperaments, resulting in a prudential judgment about the feasibility – in various respects – of a certain action.[64] Hence, a sage knows that theoretical knowledge cannot determine everything, since it "fails[s] to capture the fine detail of the concrete particular."[65] However, because practical wisdom is essentially a *reasoned* capacity, it cannot be reduced to private opinion or technical know-how. Rather, practical wisdom integrates a prudential assessment of a concrete situation with theoretical insight into what is truly good for all human beings, thus enabling to distinguish true insight from self-conceit, and reasonable deliberation from fabrication. The counsels of the sage connect two extremes: the universal and the particular, a profound knowledge of theoretical principles and a balanced assessment of contingent situations. Because every situation is, to a certain extent, new and unpredictable, practical wisdom needs to combine a profound insight into the essence of the good life with a never-ending, prudential sensitivity to concrete situations.[66] This is realized by so-called rules of thumb, which offer a truthful orientation to human actions, as well as a prudential assessment of *which* rule of thumb applies to a specific action and *how* this rule should be applied in a particular situation. To put it more concretely, whereas theoretical wisdom reflects on the principles of justice, practical wisdom promotes fairness, that is, what justice means in a specific situation. Therefore, practical wisdom is "a moral judgment in [a particular] situation."[67]

This summary indicates that words and actions of healthcare chaplains during the Covid-19 pandemic can indeed be interpreted as instances of practical wisdom. Apparently, their Christian vocation does not stand in the way of their professional outreach to the nonreligious. As staffers of a field hospital, healthcare chaplains are sensitive to the often implicit and mundane existential questions of the nonreligious about meaning in life. The question, then, is whether the combined vocational and professional identity of healthcare chaplains has any added value for the existential needs of the nonreligious. The answer lies in the assumption that practical wisdom is a *reasoned* capacity or an intellectual virtue, which takes into account what is truly good for all human beings. This particular point distinguishes practical wisdom from technical know-how, which is often dominant in hospitals and in private opinions that swamp the public sphere. Because of their combined vocational and professional identity, healthcare chaplains are sensitive to this aspect of the existential needs of the nonreligious. As pointed out at the end of the

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[64] Robert Nozick, "What is Wisdom?," in Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life. Philosophical Meditations* (New York: Touchstone, 1989), 270f.

[65] Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 300.

[66] For a more extensive analysis of (practical) wisdom, see Peter Jonkers, "Philosophy and Wisdom," *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* 112, no. 3 (2020): 261-277.

[67] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), 304f.

previous section, the flipside of the individualization of meaning in life is the fading of stabilizing structures, which means that people have to find answers to existential questions alone without the support of broader horizons of importance, value, and meaning, which offer orientation to questions about meaning in life. Because these horizons are constitutive to our identity, as Taylor has convincingly argued, ignoring them for the sake of greater authenticity and autonomy paradoxically undermines the ideal of authenticity and autonomy itself.[68] As for the nones, who are so strongly attached to this ideal, this implies that they need to recognize the importance of horizontal transcendence. Healthcare chaplains, due to their dual identity, may be able to assist them with this. They can offer a counterweight to the individualism and the lack of orientation that are typical of today's dominant existential culture. However, this conclusion should not be interpreted to mean that the nonreligious would therefore be willing to transform horizontal transcendence into vertical transcendence. What healthcare chaplains can offer is an awareness of the importance of broader horizons of meaning and value, which enables the nonreligious to find orientation in moments of great existential need.

Conclusion

After having analyzed the beliefs of the nonbelievers in many Western societies, in particular their lack of broader horizons of meaning in life, the central claim of this paper is that the idea of practical wisdom is a viable way to connect with the nonreligious from a Christian perspective, supposing that this idea is interpreted in a less oppositional way than Paul's sharp distinction between worldly and divine wisdom. An analysis of the work of healthcare chaplains during the pandemic has shown that there are good reasons to soften this opposition. More generally, this article has also analyzed a few conditions that have to be met in order to connect effectively with the nonreligious. First of all, the nonreligious should be approached on their own terms, that is, not as people in search of a deeper, spiritual meaning of life but as people whose prime concern is leading a happy life. Occasionally, they are confronted with questions about meaning in life, but they deal with these questions in an implicit way and on the level of their everyday, mundane lives. Second, because of a narrowed view of the ideals of authenticity and autonomy, and the corresponding fading of the broader horizons of meaning and value, which dominates our times, the nonreligious experience a heavy existential burden in giving orientation to their lives. In this situation, Christians may be able to connect with the nonreligious by offering them a broader horizon of meaning to serve as a counterweight to the individualism and subjectivism of our times. However, Christians should not act upon the nonreligious in a proselytizing way by trying to transform their openness to horizontal transcendence into the Christian idea of vertical transcendence.

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[68] Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 39-41.

The words and actions of healthcare chaplains in field hospitals all over the world during the pandemic offer an excellent example of the relevance and viability of this approach, which may inspire Christians who are active in other parts of secular societies.

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Western Europe: "Secularization Light"?[1]

PAUL M. ZULEHNER

I was asked to provide a few words about the far-reaching issue of secularization in Western European societies, under the title of Secularization Light. To do this, I have chosen a biographical approach. At the end of my paper, backed by my mentor and friend Peter L. Berger, I will defend the position that the theory of secularization is unsuitable for interpreting the ideological/religious dimension of the liberal cultures of Western Europe. The theory of secularization is used more as an instrument: by church leaders who are tormented by the transformation of their church from the Constantinian era to today's pluralistic era, and also by ideological warriors who do not want to come to terms with the fact that a forcefully implemented end of religion does not seem to be taking hold.

Habilitation Studies in Konstanz with Thomas Luckmann

In 1970, during my postdoctoral studies with Thomas Luckmann in Konstanz, I dealt intensively with the question of the secularization assumption or hypothesis, which was much discussed in the 1970s. My work was published under the title, *Säkularisierung von Gesellschaft, Person und Religion. Religion und Kirche in Österreich* (Secularization of Society, Person and Religion. Religion and Church in Austria, Freiburg, 1973). During my studies in Konstanz, I came to know the complexity of this question. I found different approaches to it in the writings of two great sociologists of knowledge: Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger. Berger was of the opinion that the institutions of modern society are becoming increasingly secularized. Luckmann contradicted him: of course, the institutions in modern societies understand each other secularly, but this does not mean secularization is taking place. For Luckmann, religion merely becomes invisible.[2] Religion cannot disappear entirely. The end of religious transcendence would mean the end of human beings.

It has already become clear that the secularization hypothesis is closely bound to the concept of religion. Those who, as Berger does, understand religion substantively (following Rudolf Otto, for instance), and view religion as community-generating, have diagnosed deep changes in the position of religious communities in modern societies. Luckmann, however, understands religion functionally – which has often been criticized – and ultimately

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[2] Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1974).

identifies it with being human and with the ability to transcend space and time. During my time in Konstanz, the sociologist Günter Dux provided me with more food for thought. He regarded secularization (only) as a category for interpreting a transformation process occurring in the ideological dimension of society. However, interests always play a role in the interpretations that shadow generated knowledge. Who benefits from this interpretation? At that time, I discovered for myself that the secularization hypothesis is used by those in the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. At a symposium in Gniezno, I witnessed the Archimandrite Hilarion publicly ask Cardinal Kasper to fight secularization together with the Orthodox Church.

Meeting of Experts in Berlin

At the end of the 1970s, I received an invitation from Berger to a congress of the world's leading experts in sociology of religion. The following extraordinary experts were present:

- Danièle Hervieu-Léger from France. She later published her research into the modern forms of religion in *La religion en mouvement: le pèlerin et le converti*, 1999. In her opinion, two types of believers stand out: the pilgrim and the convert.
- Grace Davie from Great Britain. She later advocated the hypothesis of a vicarious religion. She sees it as very important to treat Europe as a special case on this issue (*Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*, 2002) because religion is booming worldwide, especially in its evangelical form (see David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*, 2002).
- Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, the Israeli sociologist. The congress was marked by his attendance. He presented his assumption that there are multiple modernities – some are compatible with religion and others are not. The old formula of the more modern, the more secular forces one to ask: Which modernity is meant here?

No one at the congress showed unreserved sympathy for the secularization hypothesis which dominated the 1970s.

Empirical Research of Religion

Early in my life, via the Institute for Church Social Research in Vienna, I first began to research the changes in church life and then, subsequently, the development of the ideological dimension in Europe, especially in Austria. Since 1970, in ten-year intervals, I have researched religion in the lives of Austrians. In 1980, I was invited by Jan Kerkhofs to join the board of the

European Values Systems Study Group (EVSS). The rich data for Europe and especially for Austria fed my scientific doubts about the durability of the secularization hypothesis, for both Austria and Europe. I described the long-term development of the ideological dimension in Austrian culture over the course of half a century with the concepts of "Verbuntung" (2011) and "Wandlung" (2020). The example of Austria shows that there is no simple transition from a Catholic to a secularized culture. Rather, there is a coloriza-tion, a pluralization. In all surveys, there was a colorful typology of the Churchly, the Privately-Religious, the Skeptics, and the Atheizing.
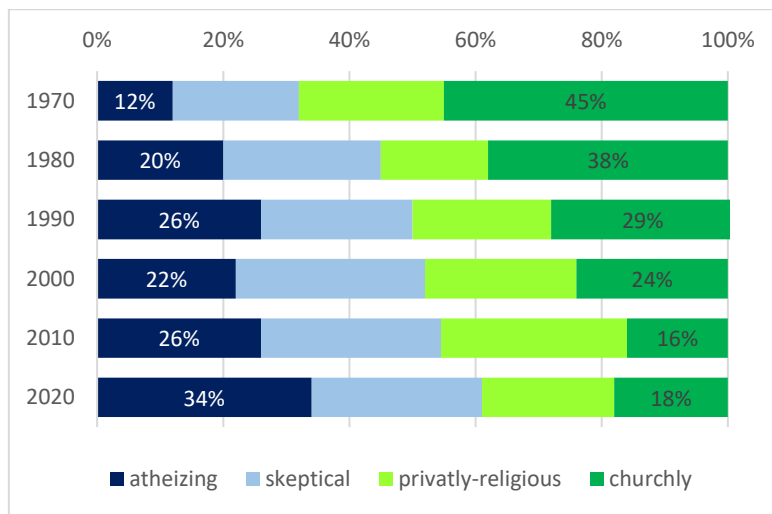
2013 Seminar in Boston

I presented the above insights at a seminar in Boston in 2013. An important topic of discussion was the question of why Europe is developing differently from the other continents. A key reason was seen in the aftermath of the Reformation, close to the dirty Thirty Years' War. The connection between God and violence made by the hostile denominations and their political backers had fatal consequences.

Throughout this war, a serious discrediting of these Christian denominations took place. The promised "Landfrieden" did not come. One consequence was pointed out by the Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire, who was convinced that there could only be "Landfrieden" without the hostile Christian denominations. The French atheists went a step further and thought that only a society without God could be peaceful. If one looks from this history to contemporary findings in the field of sociology of religion, one sees that manifold variants of this thesis can be found in Europe today: church-bound peoples, privately-religious, atheizing, and, above all, skeptics.

This Boston seminar triggered a far-reaching consequence for Berger. In his last book, *The Many Altars of Modernity* (2014), he revoked his earlier secularization theories.

Conclusion

I will summarize my biographical experiences in a few points:

1. Ideologically mono-colored cultures can only be asserted in authoritarian-totalitarian societies. The power of medieval princes, such as the absolutistic Josephinism (which was similar to tsarism in Russia), was supported, using all social and state means, by a mono-colored Catholicism; or, similarly, communist totalitarianism was enforced by a mono-colored atheism. Authoritarian-totalitarian systems make their respective worldview an inescapable fate for the peoples.

2. (Modern) liberal societies dissolve (often through silent processes) imposed (forced) worldview monopolies. This applies to Catholicism and this will predictably also be the case with the currently imposed atheism. Berger describes a shift from fate to choice. If people choose, the probability of ideological diversity increases. Modern liberal cultures are therefore always ideologically pluralistic – they have many altars. They are multi-colored, a meadow of flowers, and not a monotonous sports turf.

3. What is currently interpreted as secularization is, in fact, the dissolution of imposed fateful ideological monopolies (e.g., the Catholic monopoly in Austria or Bavaria). The result is the development not of mono-colored/ secular societies but, instead, of ideologically multi-colored/ pluralistic societies.

4. It may be that there are (still to be researched) reasons for why the group of the atheizing is currently growing in some European societies, while the number of consistently believing and practicing Christians is decreasing. But these groups are typologically on the fringes; the largest groups are the skeptics (the insecure), and also the privately-religious (Austria 1970-2020).

5. The decrease in the category of consistently committed Christians probably also has to do with the fact that the Christian churches have, for too long, relied on a kind of socio-cultural self-evidence. It has only been possible to turn culturally-supported Christianity into a personal Christianity with a small number of followers. Religion and church-hostile systems (such as nazis or communists) have left a valuable side effect in this respect.

Atheizing

6. Until now, little research has been done into how atheists (who also exist in the West) interpret the world and themselves in it and what consequences they draw from this interpretation for their personal and social

lives. The 2020 analyses in Austria show that one of the greatest differences between followers and deniers of God is that they live in realities with a different span of the transcendental dimension. While the reality of those who deny God is narrowly limited in time and space, the reality of those who believe in God appears infinite and eternal, without spatial-temporal limitations. For some, the boundary of death is the definitive, insurmountable, and inescapable end; this makes those who deny God mortals. Those who believe in God experience themselves (in the great majority) as immortals because, for them, death is a transition, not a downfall. The core research question is: which practical consequences follow from these two contrary definitions of reality? How do people who either follow or deny God live, shape their relationships, choose which political beliefs to hold, decide how they want to die, arrive at their stance on the question of the protection of human life from the cradle to the grave (abortion, euthanasia)?

7. Berger formulated a still largely unexplored question in his 2014 book. By drawing on his sociology of knowledge, developed with Luckmann, he poses the question of whether people living in pluralistic societies (which have both secular and religious dimensions) might also be expected to be pluralistic in their inner being, in their consciousness. Their art of living consists of living with different structures of relevance (Alfred Schutz) belonging to different worlds. Since the secular realities and the religious realities are, in many aspects, not consistent, this creates an inner challenge for modern people to cope with both realities. This is a variation of the question of how Christians under national socialism or communism managed to be Christians. Many people in pluralistic cultures experience a cognitive dissonance that generates cognitive stress. But how do contemporaries live with this? This is where research begins. We can assume that there are some types of groups: some people withdraw from the religious realm and break off all communication with a religious community; others emigrate from the secular world and settle into sect-like groups; others remain present in the secular world and risk cultural martyrdom; still others demand from their own religious community to become more modern and to avoid unnecessary cognitive stress – and if religious communities are not prepared to do this, quite a few find a solution for themselves by becoming (as I already published in 1974) "Auswahlchristen," or selective Christians.[3] Finally, not to be forgotten are the balancers who adapt themselves with seismographic precision to the respective structure of relevance with which they are currently dealing.

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[3] See Paul M. Zulehner, *Hoffnung für eine taumelnde Welt. Eine Pastoraltheologie für Europa* (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2024).

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Recognition, Irony, and Faith

KURT APPEL

Preliminary Remarks

Many Different Ways of Believing in Secular Contexts

It is obvious today that Europe, along with much of the rest of the world, is experiencing progressive secularization. Religion is no longer considerd an ideology as much as it was in past decades, and Marxism, which is decidedly hostile to religion, has lost a great deal of its influence. This does not change the fact that institutionalized forms of religion are losing their once massive influence and social bonding power. This can be observed primarily in Europe and the Americas (despite the advance of Evangelical movements in Latin America). However, there is some evidence that the phenomenon of increasing secularization of personal faith has also spread to other parts of the world, even to Islamic states where faith is socially binding. Whatever the case may be, in the European context, the main question is definitely: What is replacing religion today or what beliefs are being added to religious traditions?

One could address a few different phenomena for an article like this. First of all, it is obvious that many people today have very demanding ethical convictions that do not arise from a religious standpoint. Many associate faith with a belief in family and civic values such as decency, friendship, justice, and peace, as well as a conviction in the absolute value of nature and animal rights. In addition, participation in religious communities seems to have been replaced by the feeling of belonging to brands, football clubs, sports idols, music genres, or the world of certain films and TV series, especially in the fantasy film genre. Belief in the Force, as propagated by the Jedi in Star Wars, has no direct social bonding power, of course, but the world associated with it, just like the world of many other series, has an increasing meaning-making function for followers: the fantasy world offers narratives that enrich and sometimes even structure the lives of the fan community. People no longer really believe in the promises of meaning in the daily world of work and public life; rather, they seek out fictional places with which they can identify. This is especially true when social worlds become more and more fragile, and religion is no longer able to serve as an exit from these worlds. For many people, especially the intellectually oriented, culture and science have an equally important function in generating personal meaning. In any case, a colorful mixture of religious and moral-ethical convictions can be observed at present, but many identity-forming moments in sports, culture, and the media are also taking the place of religion.

Mixed Identities

Another phenomenon is the coexistence of different religious and noetic identities within one person. Nowadays, young people in particular live their faith convictions situationally without being opportunistic in the least. A spiritual place can lead one person to prayer who, in other contexts, would want nothing to do with faith convictions at all. Not only does this mean that beliefs change in the course of a person's biography, but also that multiple beliefs can overlap, making it impossible to pinpoint a person's core identity.

Apocalyptic Atmospheres and a Nihilistic Mood

Over and above all this, a kind of apocalyptic mood can certainly be observed. It is not only the ecological crisis and climate change that call humanity's existence into question, but grand narratives, such as the entropic extinction of all structures from which there is certainly no escape for humanity, also loom large. On the one hand, humanity finds itself more at the center of attention than ever before insofar as everything must be subjected to its needs; on the other hand, humanity experiences itself as a meaningless and accidental detail of a history that is taking place without it and in which it no longer has a specific purpose.

Individual Faith and Religion as a Social Bond

In addition to the completely different forms of individual faith and personal searches for meaning, the question arises as to what still holds societies together. Is it purely economic interests or is it common traditions and hopes that bind us to one another? Ultimately, it can be stated, especially in view of the current fragmentation of society, the plurality of narratives, and also the crisis of universal meaning, that the recourse to supposed or real traditions can be attractive in order to give a community a common, unifying orientation. This can lead to the paradoxical situation (as seems to be the case in Iranian or Russian societies, for example) that personal belief and the role of religion in the state can become completely divorced. The latter can ideologically underpin the state without the citizens of the state personally participating in the guiding religious symbol system or, to put it more simply: individual loss of religion as a mass phenomenon and the increasing social significance of religion are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Objective of the Work

In view of the situation outlined here, this paper seeks to ask: What function does religion still have after the end of the dominance of religiously

shaped symbolic orders, and how can religious (but also secular) convictions be lived today? By addressing the function of religion and the way in which religion can be lived, we aim to take a deeper look at the question of what people (can) still (honestly) believe in today.

In this context, the question of the recognition of the Other is of paramount importance. Recognition in this sense not only represents a central challenge of every faith and religion, but has itself become a central moment of social bonding. Ultimately, recognition of the Other is the bond that holds democratic and pluralistic societies together and gives meaning to both religious and secular traditions.

This importance of the recognition of the Other as a new form of belief and meaning is due to the pluralistic convictions that shape our societies and, moreover, due to the completely contradictory identities with which our cultures operate today (one thinks, for example, of the area of sexuality, where sexual self-determination and (allegedly) traditional family values clash). It is also due to the fact that traditional forms of religious expression have experienced a fundamental crisis through their encounter with the secular traditions of the Occident and the ideal of personal self-determination.

This raises the question of how religious traditions can contribute to the recognition of the Other or how they also prevent such recognition. To what extent, on the one hand, do traditional religions provide resources of resistance against autocratic systems? On the other hand, to what extent do they legitimize autocratic forms of rule that respond to the pluralization and individualization of our society by levelling plurality with guiding ideas such as nation, state religion, or the vision of the creation of a new, transparent (and thus controllable), and technologically *improved*, more functional, and efficient human being? In a first step, the legitimizing function of religion for the establishment of rule, as is increasingly evident today, is addressed. In a second step, the nihilistic crisis of our secular world order is discussed. In a third step, the question of what recognition of the Other can really mean under the conditions of modernity and what function religion is able to perform in this context is touched upon. At the end, reference is made to the importance of irony, and it is shown that the question of recognition of the Other is inextricably linked to the capacity for irony, which calls beliefs of all kinds into question.

The Return of Religion as a Legitimization of Domination

The fact that religious traditions are still formative for the symbolic and political order of our current society, regardless of individual faith, is apparent again these days. The majority of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy has thrown its weight behind Putin, thereby giving him the legitimacy to style the war against Ukraine as one waged by the protector of Christianity against the godless and decadent West.

In the early twenty-first century, religiously legitimized regimes have been the rule rather than the exception. Even in the Occident, there are completely secular democracies that do not want to completely dispense with religious legitimacy. An example of this is the United Kingdom, where the king is also head of the Anglican Church. There are also states where such legitimacy is not provided for by law but is sought in practice, such as in the United States, where it would still be unthinkable for a president to openly declare him/herself nonreligious. If one looks beyond the Occident, one encounters many places in which the exercise of power is based on religious foundations: generally, in states with a Muslim majority population, but also increasingly in secular Latin America, where the advance of Evangelical and Pentecostal movements is bringing about a massive re-theologization of social discourses. This also applies to India, Japan, and other Asian states, where politics is increasingly resorting to religious traditions in order to substantiate its own claims of validity and often also in conscious opposition to the secular West.

As this article is being written, Europe is fixated on the events occurring in Ukraine, and many voices are expressing concern about the potential outbreak of a third, now nuclear, world war. Meanwhile, the situation in Africa is being pushed into the background, although massive religious conflicts are raging in more and more countries, namely, between Christianity (often Pentecostal) and Islam (often Wahabi, massively supported by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, from whom Europe wants to obtain *morally good* gas to replace *morally evil* Russian gas; as well as gas from Azerbaijan, which is currently massacring Armenians). Whatever the exact context, assurances are given that the claim of religious identities is only a pretextual argument, that Christianity and Islam have cooperated peacefully for decades, and that the real reasons for the civil wars in Nigeria, Mozambique, Central Africa, Burkina Faso, and other regions are ethnic, economic, and social issues, often fueled by ecological disasters and population growth that overwhelms already weak institutions. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the religious charge is developing its own dynamic, and that a third world war between Muslim and Christian segments of the population is threatening in Africa – a scenario not much less likely to occur than a war in Europe, and which would have global repercussions.

Behind all these conflicts lies the increasingly strong obligation today to create one's own identity, a trend that affects individuals just as much as social and religious groups. In other words, one can observe a comprehensive branding currently taking place worldwide, whereby the identities that emerge usually have little to do with *real* history and make use of traditional props that are decontextualized – not the least of which are also religious. The resulting identities are as fluid as they are empty of content. In order to be able to create community, they must resort to superficial symbolism and exclude the Other even more. Historically, in many traditional societies, i.e., those based on family and genealogy (e.g., passing on the name from father to son), homosexuality, for example, was not recognized because it did not

correspond to the genealogical ideal of sexuality, although it was by no means a crime worthy of death. It becomes so the moment identities are formed against the *decadent* West, whereby, as noted by the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk in his work *Snow,*[1] for instance, these identities particularly tend to fall back on religions and their supposed (and rarely real) traditions because religiosity, at least, offers something that the Occident does not possess.

Nihilism and the Hypocrisy of the West

In this context, one could ask why the Western model, which in its own perception is characterized by the achievements of democracy, human rights, and a liberal social order – i.e., by the recognition of the right to shape one's own life in a self-determined way as long as this does not harm or adversely affect others – is increasingly losing its appeal worldwide.

Perhaps it is interesting in this context to pay attention to the diagnoses of some of the most important Western philosophers, who each in their own way mark central upheavals in philosophy, namely, Deleuze, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Hegel. One could also add to this list the less epochal philosophers, Adorno, Agamben, and Bahr, who have nevertheless presented significant philosophical analyses of the present day. They agree that Western thought leads to tremendous nihilism. In the case of Heidegger (who was compromised by his ambivalent attitude towards the Nazi regime), it is the technical frame in which our world is instrumentalized through which the openness of being and the meaning associated with it can no longer be experienced. Whereas in the case of Nietzsche and Deleuze, it is the Western monotheistic uniformity of thought that annihilates the living and eliminates creative social processes.[2] Agamben, in his nine-volume *Homo sacer*[3] project elaborated from 1995-2015, even goes so far as to declare the Concentration Camp a paradigm of the twentieth century: modern sovereignty draws its vitality from the power to let live and to let die, i.e., it claims absolute power of disposal over naked biological life (zoè), which is deprived of any doxa. To make matters worse, sovereignty is now manifested through an endless chain of activities that no longer needs a personal sovereign but represents an absolute, all-encompassing machinery against which everyone can fall prey to exclusion and nothingness. In his book *Den Tod denken* (*Thinking Death*),[4]

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[1] Orhan Pamuk, *Snow*, trans. Maureen Freely (London: Faber & Faber, 2004).

[2] See Martin Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik," *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000); Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[3] See for the first volume, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel-HellerRoazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), and for the last volume of the project, Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[4] Hans-Dieter Bahr, *Den Tod denken* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002).

published in 2002, Hans-Dieter Bahr points out that the metaphysical-mythical images of an immortal soul or of cosmic perfection, which were supposed to address the inevitability of death and the associated withdrawal of the Other, have been replaced by the figure of nothingness, into which not only the Other, but also the cosmos as a whole, falls. In other words, the last great narrative of the modern era is that of the entropic extinction of the individual as well as the cosmos and, thus, of all history(s) and structures.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[5] Hegel (and, in his wake, Adorno and Horkheimer) approaches the Enlightenment dialectic by means of a philosophical analysis of the modern self and its position in relation to the objectified world.[6] The modern self becomes aware that it is unable to find itself in the world it encounters. It also experiences itself as alienated from traditional places of belonging such as the family and the polis (i.e., the community based on fictitious family ties), and develops an increasing distance from the world of being. In this alienation and separation from its world, which it can no longer bridge mythically and religiously, the modern self takes the great step towards the possibility of universal thinking, i.e., thinking freed from any immediate references. Thus, the modern ego, put in a philosophical nutshell by Descartes, is no longer essentially fixed, but can distance itself from everything and everyone, and the Western world irrevocably goes the way of ever greater abstraction from its immediate surroundings.

As a result, the power of local recognition of the self by the family and the immediate community, which always demanded the price of particularity, i.e., the exclusion of the Other, is also dwindling. According to Hegel, Western modernity is characterized by the fact that, due to the aforementioned experiences of alienation, *being* is replaced by reflection. The world is transformed into thought, while being and its wealth of forms are subordinated to the linearity of technical algorithms. According to Kant, who gave philosophical expression to this development, this means that being gives way to judgement. Thus, the focus is no longer on the experience of an environment but, instead, is on the (intellectual) judgement and its claim to validity, which is to be critically examined.

This can be observed in contemporary society even more than in Hegel's time. Starting with the academic enterprise and ending with the communication that runs via Twitter, Facebook, etc., the "subject" is constantly confronted with having to judge immediately – even if it is only by a "like (not like)" – and being judged in return. Hegel, on the one hand, views the process

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[5] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Werke in 20 Bänden (stw 601-620), auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832-1845 neu edierte Ausgabe, redaktion Eva Moldenhauer und Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970); for an English translation see G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller with Analysis of the Text and Foreword by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[6] See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1969).

of abstraction in modern times quite positively because it opens up the idea of the universal and thus of universal recognition in the first place; on the other hand, he believes that an incredibly nihilistic potential is revealed in this process and, above all, in the form of judgement associated with it, regardless of whether it is expressed practically-morally or scientifically-theoretically. This is because in the immediate judgement, the judging person only perceives his/her own abstract claim to validity, functioning as an act of self-discovery, and establishes him-/herself absolutely in this claim to validity, thereby completely devaluing *per se* the contingency of the Other. One could say that, according to Hegel, Kantian moral philosophy and its intellectual epigones of the nineteenth and especially twentieth centuries are nowhere near as moral as they themselves think. This critique also encompasses the idea of ideal communicative communities, behind which moral prescriptions are concealed. Although such prescriptions recognize one's own intellectuality (i.e., all that possesses a voice directly audible to reflection), they implicitly subordinate the Other, which is unable to articulate itself, to a permanent devaluation process that is no longer able to grant recognition.

The form of judgement thus remains the last representation of the modern self, which is able to step out of the constraints of the polis and the family, but denies recognition in its immediate, direct judgement. In his *Science of Logic*[7] (in the second part of *Logic*, "The Doctrine of Essence," specifically in the chapter "The Ground"), Hegel destroys the idea that judgements can attain complete validity through ever more differentiated reasoning. He shows that with the structures of reasoning, as important as they are in overcoming purely immediate expressions of opinion, one's own noetic presuppositions are also perpetuated; in this way, one does indeed move within the sphere of cognition, albeit a cognition that remains within the validity claims and axiomatics of one's own self and thus does not involve any recognition (of the Other). This form of cognition is not sufficiently capable of confronting the cognizing "I" with reality in the sense of *res aliter.* For a universal cognition, one's own presuppositions must be rendered inoperative in their linearity. [The fact that every cognition within one's own presuppositions is incomplete was also pointed out by the Viennese mathematician and logician Kurt Gödel.] In terms of judgement, this means that the universal judgement is only truly universal when it breaks through the singularity of the Other and includes this break in its judgement. Hegel expresses this in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the end of the chapter on conscience, which leads into the section on religion: the judging consciousness becomes aware that the absolute position from which it has judged the contingent Other is a thoroughly posited position (by contingencies it cannot control), thereby becoming aware of its own contingency of judging. In this way, however, a

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[7] G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986); see also G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, foreword J. N. Findlay (London/New York: Routledge, 1969), 444-488.

chain of representation, in which the world became a mirror of one's own claim to validity, collapses. The consequence is that the self finds identity neither in being nor in judgement (reflection, one's own intellectuality) and, in a certain sense, becomes lost.

Indeed, today it seems that from a global perspective the Occidental world is seen as profoundly nihilistic. On the one hand, for traditional pre-modern cultures, i.e., those based on family and religion, encountering the Occident has the effect of irrevocably calling into question their own traditional structures and thus also of eroding traditional forms of recognition, which were often tied to the practice of religiosity. On the other hand, however, it is hardly possible to achieve recognition of the Other in a truly global sense. The moral and political claims to validity of the Occidental world, (hence, human rights, democracy, recognition of the self-determination of the individual, etc.), as much as they are characterized by the universal(istic) overcoming of particular exclusions, are often seen as an imperial project. The universality claimed in Occidental self-understanding, which includes the idea of self-determination as a universal demand, is suspected of serving the enforcement of particular Occidental claims to power. In the end, large parts of the world today see themselves under the judgement of Occidental claims to validity without any corresponding recognition.

Religion and Irony

According to Hegel, in order to achieve real recognition of the Other, a massive shake-up of the self-representation of the individual or collective subject is required. In this context, one can refer to irony, which is not to be understood in the sense of mere mockery or even in the sense of being unserious, but as a figure that separates the self from its identity-giving and thus power-bestowing representations. This makes an immediate conception of the self, from which an absolute standard for judgement (of the Other) could be gained, impossible. The conservative idea of a strong and consolidated identity, from which a dialogue with the Other could then take place, is thus called into question.

For Hegel, religion and art bear witness to an abrogation of the self-representation of the ego. This may sound peculiar, especially in the context of religion insofar as religions function first of all as a form of expression of the spiritual substance of a culture or community and, therefore, represent massive markers of identity. In this respect, religion and its Absolute can express a particular claim to identity or even a universal claim to dominion.

As correct as this view is, it overlooks the fact that the ideological functionalization of religion reveals a reflexive-instrumental approach to religious phenomena that is not able to do justice to religious experience. *Deities* or religious cults, understood and used as (the highest) forms of self-representation, suppress the fact that religious experience (and one could argue something similar for art) refers to something *sacred*, non-instrumen-

talizable, and, above all, unavailable, which completely eludes the sphere of knowledge of the ego.

The crucial point is that the world of religion (like the world of art) never exists in an immediate way. *God* cannot be a direct object of human knowledge because that would immediately make him a finite object within it. If one follows Hegel's train of thought, which he unfolds in the chapter on religion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,*[8] then religion, in contrast to reflexive science and moral judgement and the claims to validity associated with them, is not the representation of the self (and its sphere of knowledge); rather, religious experiences represent (before any theological or political-ideological reflection) the radical loss of the possibility of self-representation.

The self (which is confronted with the experience of standing in a place foreign to the world and whose beginning lies in having lost itself) symbolizes this fundamental loss (which constitutes the self in the first place) through religious images (or the language of art). In this sense, there is an *ironic* potential in religion, insofar as it involves a constant separation of the self from any definitive self-conception. According to Hegel, this applies to all religions, but he illustrates it in a special way by means of Christianity, whose basic irony consists of the idea of God's death on the cross. It is precisely the Absolute that expresses an absolute loss and thus invalidates all mental images and all linguistic representations that claim ultimate validity. Of course, monotheism can be understood as a monstrous conception of totality if the irony that underlies it is forgotten, but this irony refers to a loss of images that ultimately also impacts the image of an all-encompassing unity.

What is essential in this context is that it is not a matter of invalidating all images in which the individual and collective self are represented, which would only lead to a nihilistic and undialectical destruction of the self, which would thus have no potential for recognition (of the Other). Moreover, the imageless in its abstraction would all too easily turn into the equally boundless and abstract demand to overcome the contingent and to represent the boundless and the Absolute. What corresponds to the imageless (be it a religious or moral absolute) is the judgement that condemns every contingent representation and contingent concretization of life. In the previous century, no thinker saw this as clearly as Kafka in his novel *The Trial*. Instead of attacking the image in which power is realized, the aim is to ironize it. This means that the images are separated from any ultimately total representation and message of the ego, that they are allowed to remain open to meaning as contingent images, and that they thus invite a playful approach. With regard to the Catholic Church, for example, it could be said that the only justification for Catholic aesthetics and the doctrines and institutionalizations associated with them is that these aesthetics provide an infinitely rich playground for ironizing. Perhaps the reason why most European monarchies are such stable democracies is because their states are represented by deeply ironic figures: monarchs who have absolutely no real political influence. However, irony is

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[8] See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 410-478.

never to be confused with relativism, since the latter levels all meanings within an absolute distance and thus does not playfully open itself to constantly new configurations of meaning.

Conclusion: Recognition and Religion

Every form of real recognition of the Other exists from the fact that the self experiences a shift in relation to its own representation. It is only when the moment of becoming-Other inscribes itself in the subject, when the self can no longer usurp the monolithic absolute position of judgement, that an opening to its own otherness is possible. As a result, the contingency of the Other can find hospitable reception and loses its status as a mere stranger to be excluded. Today's pluralistic society confronts its citizens with the challenge of transcending their own culture and its spiritual substance, and life can thus take place in open transitions. Even democracy, where it merits the name and is distinct from an imperial gesture, cannot build on strong, totalitarian representations, but is rooted in a memory that is characterized both by the ability to empathize with the Other and by the ability to treat the self with irony. Religious traditions can contribute to this if they do not see themselves as hegemonic projects. In any case, the fact remains that it is precisely the immediacy of today's mass media that endangers the capacity for irony and too easily turns into the domination logic of immediate judgement, no matter how justified these judgements may sound. A genuine ethos does not mean falling into indifference or relativization, but it does mean developing a form of recognition that is never purely self-reflexive. It involves an impossible (not in a moral but in an ironic sense, since every possibility would always be located in the field of the self) response to the Other, individually and politically.

The pluralistic approach to religious traditions offers great potential for a recognition of the Other that goes beyond mere tolerance. The boundaries between belief and nonbelief, as well as the boundaries of different religious and ideological traditions, are in many cases fluid today. This makes it possible to ironize one's own beliefs and thus open up to new, *other* images and representations. It should be emphasized that this is neither an opportunistic adaptation nor a cynical distancing from one's own convictions. Rather, it is the knowledge that religion in particular is subversive to one's own representations and can therefore cultivate an openness to the Other. The idea of recognition associated with this form of irony in no way implies a diminished piety (does not every authentic piety lead to a relativization of one's own self?) and does not replace particular religious traditions or their secular surrogates and continuations. However, it does provide a benchmark for a form of faith that has its universal expression in pluralistic democracy based on the ideas of self-determination and recognition of the Other. The alternative might be totalitarian political systems and the belief in submission to a collective, whereby the images, representations, and religious traditions

that serve as its outward expression are completely insignificant. The absolute totality and complete negation of all irony would be nihilism because this annihilates all independent meaning. From this perspective, there could be no recognition but only erasure of the Other. Therefore, what can be believed in, even by those who do not believe in the sense of certain religious traditions, is the overcoming of nihilism and the recognition of the Other.

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Promoting a New Yes to Life:
Reckoning Theologically with
Affiliational Diversity in Catholic-Heritage Education and Ministry[1]

TOM BEAUDOIN

Personal Background for a Theology Open for "Nonbelief"

My research about changing religious affiliations in current and formerly Christian-dominant contexts is part of a life story that fits well with this book's theme of the faith and beliefs of "nonbelievers." My theology tries to make room for "nonbelief" out of my own attempts to reckon with my "nonbelief." (I retain quotation marks around the term to signify its ambiguity.) I spent the first forty years of my life as an active Catholic, before the sexual abuse crisis and accumulated intellectual dissatisfactions with Christianity propelled me into what I experience as a more open, searching space of ongoing transit and transition, deeply curious and ready to begin again, but for the first time as an adult, in paying attention to what I really wanted out of life, and to be more honest about how little I knew about life's big questions that had been pre-sorted for me, having grown up Catholic and trained as a Catholic theologian and educator.

I was raised to be sensitive to ritual, liturgy, and sacred space, to respect mystery. I was formed to experience the ungraspable as heraldic. These dispositions were shaped not only because of my Catholicism, but music: I became passionate about popular music as a preteen and, as a bassist, started playing in rock bands in high school, becoming an appreciator of live music and developing a love of venues, of the ways that built environments and stage accoutrements curated experiences of transport in a rock concert. Live music as liturgy, sacred space and mystery seemed to have the power to empower people's individuality while at the same time driving down differences.

It is also significant that these were Catholic and musical incubations in largely white midwestern United States environments: my parents and siblings, all our friends, the Catholic church of my youth, the lower middle-class neighborhoods in which I grew up, the public and Catholic schools I attended.

My early experiences with persons of color were in the context of my father's practice of ministry: visiting imprisoned persons with my (ordained Catholic deacon) father, hosting Vietnamese and Central American Catholic refugee families or visiting their houses, volunteering at soup kitchens.

White people were my intimate taken-for-granted world. Although my family had persistent financial problems, baking a familiarity with and fondness for lower-middle and working-class families in me, and I sometimes felt ashamed of the difference between my situation and my middle-class peers, an everyday white background of school, church and popular music tastes provided a common matrix. White, male-led, Christian-heritage cultural institutions are my point of departure – worlds about which I feel ambivalent, finding myself empathetic and dissatisfied at the safety and smallness they provided, and of which I am still a part at the (slowly changing) Jesuit-heritage university where I work.

Having spent my doctoral studies and entire higher education teaching and research career in United States Jesuit-heritage universities exemplifies this narrative: they are spaces where white male leadership and preferences not only hold sway but are justified by the sponsoring (Roman Catholic) religious denomination and (Jesuit) community's masculinist official theology, and yet honeycombed within these universities are projects of justice and radical theology/religious studies that would upend the university's order of things if they were more than "housed" within the structure, and that continually tensify and feed back on the normative theologies of the institution.

It is from this matrix of possibilities and limitations that I am preoccupied with the theological significance of shifting religious affiliation away from longstanding traditions, signified by the rise of people identifying with no particular religious tradition. I am especially interested in what the shifting fates of affiliation mean for Catholicism and for theological education in Catholic-heritage institutions.[2] Moreover, I want to know how the stabilities and instabilities of (non)religious affiliation are entangled with other aspects of personal and collective identity, with cultural creativity, and with political projects. These are aspects of a theology for the present.

In what follows, I will sketch the changing landscape of Catholic affiliation in the United States, recommend a posture for Catholic-heritage education and ministry that fits this changing landscape, open the doors of

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[2] My accounting for the biases and perspectivality of the self in theological production is informed by Courtney T. Goto, *Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope of Community* (Leiden: Brill, 2018) and Cynthia B. Dillard, *Learning to (Re)Member the Things We've Learned to Forget: Endarkened Feminisms, Spirituality, and the Sacred Nature of Research and Teaching* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012). Thus have I tried in this chapter to provide a capsule narration of some determinative lines of force contributing to this project – an attempt at "grabb[ing]" life "by [its] guilded beams," because for the accounts of reflexivity from which I have learned, "that's what tradition means" (The Smiths, "I Started Something I Couldn't Finish," track 2 on *Strangeways, Here We Come*, Rough Trade, 1987).

one church that has inspired my approach, and conclude with some suggestions for what could happen next for those who are able to revise our practice.

The Changing Scene of Religious Affiliation

Several years ago, a professor colleague at another university remarked to me with a mix of confusion and compassion that her oldest child, a young adult, had become a "none" – no longer affiliated with the family's faith tradition. Leaning on our long professional connection, and given my research on changing religious affiliation, I asked if we could talk about how her experience of parenting a child who went from affiliated to disaffiliated influenced her approach to teaching about faith, religion, and theology. "It is not clear," she said. I had the impression that she did not want to talk more about it. It was then that I sensed that something possibly meaningful was going on, not just for this educator and parent, but for larger conversations about religion and education, if only we could pursue it when the time was right.

I started listening more for such experiences among colleagues and students, and this sense – that many people are carrying complicated experiences of affiliation that would trouble common notions of belonging in theological education – has continued. Here are some composite examples, drawn from my teaching:

A 21-year old Latina undergraduate writes about respecting her parents' Central American Catholicism, and taking the best values from it that she treasures, but needing to define her own way, to discover her own beliefs and practices that may take her beyond Catholicism. She has dated people of other or no religions and imagines that her religious or nonreligious future will be different from what her parents wanted for her, a topic of occasional conversation with them.

A 60-something Indian-American female religious educator who volunteers in a Catholic parish setting says that of her three adult children, one remains an active Catholic and two are not interested in being part of a religious community but have found meaning in other things that ground them. She struggles with the tension between what she teaches at church and how she relates to her grown children. She rarely talks about this in the parish and has not felt comfortable with, or permission for, integrating this into her catechesis and religious education, and she is not sure where to begin in doing so.

A white 50-something lay minister exercises leadership in a congregation struggling to connect with younger generations. His partner used to be involved in the church, and still participates, but the older he gets, the more he explores different therapies and forms of meditation. The minister keeps up appearances in the denomination as best he can with integrity, and he believes in evangelizing younger generations and promoting active church membership, but in his most honest moments he wonders what the future

holds and whether he is ready to meet it, and moreover, how this is part of God's plan for this church.

Such stories abound in theological education – under the surface. Apart from sharing stories, usually discreetly, person to person, most students, faculty, staff, and administrators seem to keep them quiet. The diverse and changing affiliations of family and friends of Catholic ministers and educators, or of ministers and educators themselves, is one of the open secrets of theological education and of the churches. It remains largely unacknowledged and unintegrated. I would like that to change, because changing the silence around it would help theological education in Catholic-heritage institutions to creatively engage the broader changes in religious affiliation.

When I refer to a decline in religious affiliation, I am referring to the rise of the so-called nones: those who, when asked in religion research, do not claim a religious affiliation. I also refer more broadly to the apparent increase in affiliational diversity in the United States and beyond: people who are moderately affiliated, unaffiliated, multiply affiliated, and people who move around between affiliations in a variety of relations to the religious communities that matter in their personal and social history and context: practicing what matters most to them within, on the margins, and outside of such communities.

One way of talking about affiliational diversity is to distinguish between normative and nonnormative affiliations. In regard to the Catholic-heritage and Jesuit-heritage context in which I practice theological education, I use the phrase "normative affiliation" to describe what is in practice taken by people as obligatory about Catholicism, Jesuit values, or their particular denomination or tradition. These are obligations and expectations that people learn from those with a shaping authority in their life, history, and culture, from familial elders to teachers to ministers to media figures and more. I use the phrase "nonnormative affiliation" to refer to people practicing differently, holding their lives together differently, than those who strive to manage the boundaries of formal religious identity would endorse. This nonnormative affiliation will vary according to the person's and group's denominational/ traditional cultures and can be quite nuanced on the ground, such as counting oneself as Catholic but not attending church, not counting oneself as Catholic but occasionally attending, participating in or claiming membership in more than one denomination or religion simultaneously, or espousing beliefs or undertaking practices that are at odds with what are taken to be normative Catholic expectations. Because nonnormative and normative are usually taken up with as real in one's personal and social life, and because nonnormative and normative are always construed in relation to each other (what is normal presumes what is not normal, and *vice versa*), expectations about and practices of belonging and nonbelonging, believing and nonbelieving, will vary from context to context.

The difficulty of incorporating or even acknowledging affiliational diversity in Catholic-heritage theological education is likely to do with the

ideological bent of Catholic-heritage religious and theological education in the United States, pitched as it is toward encouraging what is taken to be proper (as orthodox) belief and practice, typically encouraging active affiliation as the ideal form of practice.

Nonnormative affiliation, in practice, means affiliational diversity, a wide range of ways of relating to what is taken and propounded to officially matter. In the United States, Catholics are more likely to be modestly affiliated, marginally affiliated, and unaffiliated with church, than to be highly affiliated. Taking care to be curious about affiliational diversity can turn our attention to how people navigate, in their lived experience, what they take to be the expectations of their religious and nonreligious tradition(s).

Affiliational diversity describes Roman Catholicism in its declining overall numbers of children presented for baptism, confirmation, and first communion, fewer adults for church marriage, and fewer men for ordination, while the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) is rarely chosen.[3] Individuals and families with a Catholic heritage are not continuing expected affiliation practices, creating a crisis for sustaining and reproducing the lifelong adherents which the church expects, to which it had recently become accustomed, and on which its institutional life is thought to depend. The Second Vatican Council called for the "fully conscious and active participation" of the whole church,[4] and while this call inspired monumental strides in lay empowerment, this vision of thoroughgoing involvement has not come about in the United States, and increasingly seems like a dated wish. This is not for lack of trying. Decades of Catholic educators' advocacy of a sacramental imagination and social justice have not prevented the affiliational slide, nor has the assertive promotion of the New Evangelization been able to reverse it.[5]

Recent reports chart the shift. In 2018, the Pew Research Center reported that

Catholicism has experienced a greater net loss due to religious switching than has any other religious tradition in the United States. Overall, 13% of all adults in the United States are former Catholics – people who say they were raised in the faith, but now identify as religious 'nones,' as Protestants, or with another religion. By contrast, 2% of U.S. adults are converts to Catholicism – people who now identify as Catholic after having been raised in

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[3] Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/.

[4] Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

[5] See Tom Beaudoin, "Cultural Catholicism," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Catholicism*, eds. Margaret McGuinness and Thomas Rzeznik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 325-342.

another religion (or no religion). This means that there are 6.5 former Catholics in the United States for every convert to the faith. No other religious group […] has experienced anything close to this ratio of losses to gains via religious switching.[6]

As a symbol of Catholicism's changing status in the United States, in 2019, the number of unaffiliated persons in the United States surpassed those affiliated with Roman Catholicism.[7]

The Gallup research organization has reported that

Americans' membership in houses of worship continued to decline [in 2020], dropping below 50% for the first time in Gallup's eight-decade trend. In 2020, 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque, down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1999[.] The decline in church membership is primarily a function of the increasing number of Americans who express no religious preference.[8]

Gallup reasoned that

the 13-percentage-point increase in no religious affiliation since 1998-2000 appears to account for more than half of the 20-point decline in church membership over the same time. Most of the rest of the drop can be attributed to a decline in formal church membership among Americans who *do* have a religious preference. Between 1998 and 2000, an average of 73% of religious Americans belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque. Over the past three years, the average has fallen to 60%.[9]

Confirming these trends, the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) reported that about one quarter of people in the United States describe themselves as not affiliated with religion, including 36% of those aged 18-29, and that religious disaffiliation varies somewhat by ethnicity and race: religious disaffiliates are 34% of Asian or Pacific Islander persons, 34% of multiracial

[6] David Masci and Gregory A. Smith, "7 Facts about American Catholics," *Pew Research Center*, October 10, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/10/7-facts-about-american-catholics/.

[7] Jack Jenkins, "'Nones' now as big as evangelicals, Catholics in the US," *Religion News Service*, March 21, 2019, https://religionnews.com/2019/03/21/nones-now-as-big-as-evangelicals-catholics-in-the-us/.

[8] Frank Newport, "Millennials' Religiosity Amidst the Rise of the Nones," Polling Matters, *Gallup*, October 29, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/267920/millennials-religiosity-amidst-rise-nones.aspx.

[9] Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," Politics, *Gallup*, March 29, 2021, https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/churchmembership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx.

persons, 28% of Native American persons, 23% of white non-Hispanic persons, 21% of Black non-Hispanic persons, and 19% of Hispanic persons.[10]

Indeed, affiliational diversity is racially and ethnically broad. As PRRI suggests, and despite media representations of white young people as nones, it is far from only a white phenomenon. As Russell Jeung, John Jimenez and Eric Mar have summarized, "Asian Americans have the highest rates of religious 'nones' of any racial group."[11] In "Generation Z, Minority Millen-nials, and Disaffiliation from Religious Communities: Not Belonging and the Cultural Cost of Unbelief,"[12] sociologist Aprilfaye Manalang of Norfolk State University engaged the literature on persons of color disaffiliating from religion and conducted 45 in-depth interviews with Filipino, Hispanic, and Black persons in Virginia. In light of the small existing literature and her interviews, Manalang argued that younger generations of color practice disaffiliation from religion in distinct ways, because they must negotiate costs that many white disaffiliates do not face. While carefully noting differences in these three communities in how they negotiate religious participation, Manalang nonetheless argued that younger generations of color tend to share certain postures about their nonbelief or nonparticipation in religion:

> Gen Z and minority millennials are clearly hesitant to officially disaffiliate from the church because they feel a cultural cost of unbelief vis-à-vis their families. In other words, just because they are skeptical of the church[,] and state they do not believe the teachings of the church[,] does not necessarily mean they will disidentify with the church[.] Family acceptance and fear of disapproval also play a major role with respect to how [they] navigate unbelief.

Moreover,

> Culture, social justice and activism, as well as empowerment matter to minority millennials. It is reasonable to assume that the motivations for why Gen Z and minority millennials are leaving the church are for different reasons than whites: Since whites tend to be the demographic majority in churches, they are far less likely

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[10] Public Religion Research Institute, July 8 2021, https://www.prri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/.

[11] Russell Jeung, John Jimenez, and Eric Mar, "The Religious and Racial Minoritization of Asian American Voters," in *Religion is Raced: Understanding American Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Grace Yukich and Penny Edgell (New York: NYU Press, 2020), 201-226, at 207-208.

[12] Aprilfaye Manalang, "Generation Z, Minority Millennials, and Disaffiliation from Religious Communities: Not Belonging and the Cultural Cost of Unbelief," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 17, no. 2 (2021): 1-24.

to feel racially and culturally excluded [if they detach from reli-
gious belief and practice].[13]

Social developments remind us of these deep changes regarding reli-
gious affiliation. In political activism, the Occupy Wall Street movement has
been analyzed by political scientists as a "civil religion of the nones,"
operating on a "theology of consensus."[14] Practical theologian and religious
educator Leah Gunning Francis, in her book *Ferguson and Faith*, showed
how Black Lives Matter activists in Ferguson were often not part of churches,
and the role of ministers was to support them as protest chaplains, accepting
the non-affiliation of many young protesters.[15] One minister was convinced
by the idea that

> You need to get out into the streets with the young people. You
> need to not tell them to get into your churches, because they
> haven't been there and they're not going […] You need to go out
> there and let them lead, and you need to listen.[16]

More mainstream chaplaincy is changing, too. Harvard University's head
chaplain, Greg Epstein, is a nonreligious humanist and atheist lauded by
students and other chaplains for his ministerial skills. Epstein is the author of
the book *Good Without God*.[17]

With regard to Catholicism in the United States, reasons for the non-
normative belongings of Catholics are complex and contested. Many are now
born into nonnormative belongings solidified in family upbringings that, like
normative affiliation, often just feels normal. For those who decelerate or
modulate their affiliation after a time of more active normative affiliation, it
seems that some move in that direction due to dissatisfying interpersonal or
ministerial relationships in the church. Others grow weary of disconnected
ritual. Many feel a lack of church teaching's relevance to life, compounded
by the sexual abuse crisis and coverup eroding the church's credibility.
Vectors of oppression also can influence how people feel about wanting to
stay active in the church. For example, economic insecurity prevents people
from getting to church. Racism in white churches deters Catholics of color
from participating. Class biases in active Catholic life prevent outreach and

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[13] Manalang, "Generation Z, Minority Millennials, and Disaffiliation from Reli-
gious Communities," 19.

[14] Aaron Quinn Weinstein, "Occupy Wall Street's Civil Religion of the Nones: A
Theology of Consensus," *New Political Science* 42, no.1 (2020): 70-86.

[15] Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership and Awakening
Community* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2015).

[16] Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 47.

[17] Greg Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People* Do *Believe*
(New York: Harper, 2010). See also Emma Goldberg, "The New Chief Chaplain at
Harvard? An Atheist," *New York Times,* Aug. 26, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/
2021/08/26/us/harvard-chaplain-greg-epstein.html.

hospitality toward working class and poor Catholic families. Moreover, many Catholics have lost their home church. Parish closings, due to shifting demographics or financial crises, can alienate members or make travel to another parish difficult.[18] It could also be that among the deepest reasons for the current changes in Catholic affiliation are changing cultural assumptions about being religious: the benefits and penalties for staying in line for Catholics and other established religious traditions no longer motivate as broadly and deeply as they once did.

Despite the great variety of families in which these affiliation changes are occurring, two phenomena seem common: First, it can be difficult in many Catholic-heritage families, churches, and educational settings to discuss openly. A nonnormative (dis)affiliation is still rarely treated as equal in value and dignity to a normative affiliation, especially in settings where the display of normative affiliation has been established as rewarded. Second, it is difficult to integrate nonnormatively affiliated persons and their ideals into a vision for Catholic-heritage education, to perceive such persons adding to, or creatively reconstructing, this educational tradition. For an educator in a Catholic-heritage institution, or for a highly-affiliated Catholic parent, to present loosely-affiliated or disaffiliated persons as exemplars for others, especially as exemplars for normatively affiliated Catholics or other normatively affiliated religious persons, is rare. For many Catholic ministers, educators, and parents, there is something embarrassing or even shameful about nonnormative affiliation – even if they are the ones practicing it. People who (or whose families and friends) are not living up to active participation are often made to feel "less than" in formal Catholic-heritage education discourse, and their stories are presumed to be stories of tragedy, loss, decline, or failure for the church, and for the nonnormatively affiliated person(s) as well.[19]

The Pantheon as Inspiration

My advocacy for affiliational diversity through theological higher education and in religious education in churches more broadly is catalyzed by my research about one particular Catholic church. I have been studying the Basilica di Santa Maria ad Martyres in Rome, also known as the Pantheon, since 2004. The Pantheon crystallizes something theologically significant: it

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[18] For a recent account that combines several of these reasons and troubles in/out Catholic boundaries, see Joshunda Sanders, "Black Girl Magic," *Topic Magazine*, April 2019, https://www.topic.com/black-girl-magic.

[19] Creative recent works representing a theological rejection of this exclusionary Catholic educational heritage and proposing alternative educational and ministerial projects that promote affiliational diversity, include Gregory Baker, *Disaffiliating Ministry: Spiritual Growth, Gender, and Campus Ministry* (New York: Lexington, 2019), and James Michael Nagle, *Out on Waters: The Religious Life and Learning of Young Catholics Beyond the Church* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2020).

is a living example of how Christian churches can be experienced, paradoxically, as more-than-Christian. I would go further: many Christian churches today can be of greater service to a diverse world, particularly in settings where Christianity is or was an established state-favored power, and where Christian-centric exclusions are impoverishing relational and religious/ nonreligious diversity on the ground, when those churches let through their more-than-Christian past and present.

I consider the Pantheon to be a dramatic instantiation of how churches harbor affiliational diversity. The affiliational diversity of many churches is usually covered over by the ideal affiliation presented and ritualized by its ministers and educators. The multilayered character of the Pantheon, however, is much harder to hide than the multilayered character of most other churches, and in a corollary way, its solicitations to diverse publics are also harder to hide. The Pantheon is a palimpsest where layers of religions and secularities are overlaid and interleaved, a palimpsest of ancient Roman religion and imperial aspiration; of late antique, medieval, and modern Roman Catholic Christianity; and of modern Roman-Italian culture and politics. From the perspective of the monument and its material contents, different parts of the church have meant different things to different people over the centuries and have become part of the church through other religious heritages. From the perspective of multitudes who have visited the Pantheon, there is evidently no single controlling meaning for faith or practice, as people take up many relationships to what is on offer. From the perspective of the official Catholic ministry that curates most of the arrangements inside the monument, the changing official Catholic significations of the architecture and art over the centuries, communicated today through evolving audio-guides, placards and videos, leave room for affiliational diversity by anticipating a more-than-Italian and more-than-Catholic public and thus some degree of variation among visitors' interests in the Pantheon. In other words, from three per-spectives there are investments in more-than-Christian presentations: from the art and architecture, from the visitors, and from the ministry.

While the Pantheon is not presently a parish church, as a basilica it provides Mass on weekends and holy days, and presents occasional Christian-themed concerts or recitals. The monumental architecture of the Pantheon is famous, with its temple front, intermediate block and rotunda capped by a massive unsupported concrete dome, permanently open to air, light, rain – and occasionally snow – with an oculus 9 feet across. Architecture scholars typically credit it as the single most influential building in Western architecture. Built around the years 115-120, it is now approaching 2000 years of existence.

Its original purposes are a matter of scholarly debate, although very early it was known as Pantheon, "for all gods." At some point, possibly in the early seventh century, it was appropriated as a Catholic church, and seems to have operated continuously as such since then. Identifying marks of its Christianness are evident today: there is an altar in the niche directly opposite the

entrance, with a colorful medieval cross-themed stonework design in the apse behind; there are copies of an icon of Mary and Jesus possibly gifted to the Pantheon early; stations of the cross are mounted on walls around the circumference; sculptures and paintings of saints occupy the niches around the rotunda, and Mary the mother of Jesus is featured in numerous places; there is a modest organ to the side of the altar. In recent years, several rows of mobile pews have been set in front of the altar and left out all day long. The two weekend masses each draw around 75-150 people, depending on the season. Mass-goers are a tiny part of the church's guests – there were 9.7 million visitors in 2019.[20] Many of those visitors appear to be surprised to find out that the Pantheon is a church. Some leave unsure whether it is. It is understandable. Looking at the structure from outside, there is nothing to identify it as Christian. Today, the piazza flows right to the temple front and many people wander in, even if it was not on their itinerary. There are no tickets or entrance fees (although as of this writing, a free reservation system for weekend visits that was put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic remains).

Even today, people walking in can encounter some fundamental aspects of the structure's original design, which corresponded to a different theology – that of ancient Roman religion. (This is not to say that the ancient theology is directly accessible today through the architecture, as that theology would have been associated with the architecture in a cultural context quite different from now.) Even today, one enters amidst the high thick columns holding up the massive pediment and flanked by apses, now vacant of statues of gods or emperors, on either end of the temple porch. Passing through the columns, visitors approach giant doors, and the eye is drawn through the doors to the great apse directly across (which in antiquity featured a statue of a god). Yet come closer, and you see above the door an ancient metal grill, through which the sunlit oculus can be glimpsed partly through its thin grating. Just as the temple porch has sheltered and contained the visitor on all sides, the empty center of the dome beckons through the grill above the door. This is often where curiosity begins and astonishment commences.

As you pass the threshold and enter the vast circular space, everyone immediately looks up to view the oculus directly, an empty circle at the very center of the dome, always the color of the sky at that moment. This simple progressive mystagogy of porch – door – rotunda – oculus – this stepwise revelation – was apparently intentional in the ancient architecture, perhaps to reveal the sun's divine illumination as divine, and/or to confect a felt cosmic-earthly proximity and distance under or beyond the sign of Rome. The oculus often seems to visitors dangerously close and yet imposingly, presidingly, dizzyingly distant. Even today, surrounding visitors are fifteen niches laid out around the circumference that, it is obvious to most, would have housed an array of gods in antiquity – an assumption confirmed by scholarly research. As visitors pace the open center or visit the ancient-modern statues and altars around the periphery, it is impossible not to notice that the sunlight is

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[20] Interview, Pantheon/Basilica Pastoral Staff, July 2021, Rome.

projecting in a beam down into the rotunda, in the dome, the attic, the main order, or directly on the floor. These are all features from another time and theology that still influence visitor experience.[21]

The Pantheon is a Catholic church, and at the same time more-than-Christian. Visitors seem to have a variety of experiences of the significance of their visit.[22] For some, it confirms what they think of as Christian experience. For others, it is more of a museum. For still others, there is an impact that is neither Christian nor purely informational, what some could call a moving or memorable spiritual experience. And as a venerable church in one of the most ancient fully intact buildings in the West and the world, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it belongs potentially both to Christians and to the world, to people of all affiliations.

It may help to think of the Pantheon as a church permanently on loan to us from its non-Christian heritage. We could even go further and ask: Of what church would this not be true? Just so, we each have "faith" on loan from others. With regard to Christian faith, the heritage is profoundly more-than-Christian, particularly in regard to a Jewish Jesus who was never a Christian and can be understood as permanently "on loan" to Christianities from a Judaism that most Christianities have worked to ignore if not erase. Human beings seem to be, in the words of philosopher Corey Anton, "wholly on loan to ourselves" from ideas and practices that we did not invent and cannot control. In Anton's words, we should accept that we are "incomplete, dependent, and non-self-sufficing, living out our days in borrowed space and on borrowed time."[23]

For a church like the Pantheon on loan from its more-than-Christian heritage, experienced by diverse people, a narrow vision of affiliation will not fit. Any theological higher education or church religious education intending to speak to and with the full extent of churches cannot limit itself to a normative vision of orthodox, highly-involved church practice. Such a vision would be too small to accommodate the backgrounds and potential experiences of Pantheon visitors, from more-than-Christian global backgrounds and varying religions and secularities, encountering such a palimpsestic more-than-Christian church space.[24] Careful study of the Pantheon

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[21] On the Pantheon's history and architecture, see Kjeld de Fine Licht, *The Rotunda in Rome: A Study of Hadrian's Pantheon* (Copenhagen: Jutland Archaeological Society Publications, 1968); Robert Hannah and Giulio Magli, "The Role of the Sun in the Pantheon's Design and Meaning," *Numen* 58 (2011): 486-513; William L. MacDonald, *The Pantheon: Design, Meaning, and Progeny*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Tod A. Marder and Mark Wilson Jones, eds., *The Pantheon: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[22] These are observations based on my fieldwork onsite from 2019 to the present, which will be elaborated in future publications on this research.

[23] Corey Anton, *How Non-Being Haunts Being: On Possibilities, Morality, and Death Acceptance* (Vancouver: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2021), 78.

[24] My thinking here is informed by the empirical-hermeneutical architectural theory of Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpreta-*

and other churches, particularly in settings where Christianity exercised authoritative cultural/state/colonial privilege, holds potential for educators who promote affiliation not in relation to an ideal teaching, but in relation to what people need for their lives. While one's local church may not be anything like the Pantheon, it probably still employs artwork, rituals, and architecture that have a potential shaping power on people and are derived from elsewhere, now rendering your church the sacred place on loan that it is.[25] The Pantheon welcomes anyone and makes few expectations of them, without hiding its Catholic "identity" but also without hiding its other layered and interwoven "identities" on offer. It is Catholic/Christian, yes, but paradoxically that means it is not reducible to Catholicism/Christianity. The Pantheon shows a Catholicism/Christianness that is open to the world and the cosmos, that lets show its constituent and constitutive more-than-Catholic, more-than-Christian dimensions. And most important, just as Pantheon visitors may or may not take up the offer of the Pantheon's Catholicism/Christianness, there are many people today who live with integrity as fully in, partly in, or mostly out of affiliation, people who cope in their own way in relation to what their local church offers.

Reckoning with Affiliational Diversity

Under the shelter of the Pantheon-as-church's more-than-Christianness, I now draw implications for reckoning with affiliational diversity that are intended for those whose life circumstances have them entangled with inherited forms of personal and institutional dominance, including advantaged personal/social identities and placement in Christian-heritage institutions situated in current or formerly Christian-privileging social settings. These implications are particular to the trajectory of thought articulated in this chapter and are not presumed to be generalizable. What I will recommend is meant to help those who find themselves in analogous situations, where what they have inherited does not work in the face of the affiliational diversity needs of – and life prospects for – the people in their care.

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tion, Comparison: Volume One: Monumental Occasions: Reflections on the Eventfulness of Religious Architecture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[25] One participant at the Blueprints Catholic education conference in 2010 at which I spoke about this research, in Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada, asked a question that was playful yet contained an awareness of the stakes. This Catholic school principal said, "Our school holds Mass in the gym. How do I make this relevant for my context? Should I cut a hole in the roof of the gym?" While creating an "oculus" where Mass is held (in the gymnasium) would create a dramatic awareness of the connection between the school/church's inside and outside, beyond the complex plumbing challenges involved, I heard the question as asking about how portals can be found/made within the existing structure, portals that invite the more-than-Christian character of the gym-as-church to be experienced alongside (and within) the normative Christianity of the Mass space and *vice versa*.

Reckoning with affiliational diversity involves looking at how much our theology has been invested in affiliation, and facing what it will take to learn how to promote diverse affiliations. The theological and religious educators addressed by my approach need to look back at our theologies and see how they have intended to encourage people to join us, to accept our good news, to consent to the affiliational theology that it is best for someone if they will join this team, this way of thinking, these beliefs, and these practices. Links between affiliational theologies and colonial projects will need to be investigated, focused on helping oneself and what is taken as one's tradition to the space of the other so as to make them like oneself and one's tradition, by violence, enticement, pastoral care, preaching, teaching, spiritual direction, or that typically beneficently-presented naturalizing of sacred power, religious and spiritual "formation."

In order to promote affiliational diversity, we will need to theologically educate in a way that lets people say yes to their own lives, in such a way that others' greater yes is facilitated. This will require encouraging spiritual agency, making explicit to those in our care that their journey is their journey, and our educating, insofar as it is related to their faith, is geared toward clarification of that agency and journey. We need to be able to communicate to those in our care that with respect to their religious affiliation, it is ok to stay, it is ok to go, and it is ok not to know. In other words, there can be integrity in affiliation, in nonaffiliation, or in uncertainty about where one belongs and what one should practice and believe. People's religious staying, going, and not knowing are all variations on making and finding a parking space with which they can live. These are three ways of ascribing structure to the world so that, with awareness, intentionality, access to the goods of life, and luck, people can get more of what they need to be closer to what matters most. This agency and journey is always in a responsive relation to force fields of social relations: freedom for individual decisions about religious affiliation are bound up with the wellbeing of others and their freedom for the same. Spiritual agency, individual or communal, that creates unjust burdens for other individuals or communities is not a rounded yes to life as envisioned here.

Those who can promote affiliational diversity will be able to avoid the powerful inherited assumption of religious reproduction. Theologian F. LeRon Shults defines religious reproduction as the ways religious communities have of promoting their "shared imaginative engagement with axiologically relevant supernatural agents."[26] In Christian circles, in theological education, we sometimes misleadingly call this the imperative to "pass on the faith," the necessity of "faith formation," or a mandate to take particular teachings "seriously," rhetorics and practices that veil the power dynamics involved in reproducing what counts as an authorized version of a religious tradition in another.

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[26] F. Leron Shults, *Practicing Safe Sects: Religious Reproduction in Scientific and Philosophical Perspective* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2018), 37.

Promoting affiliational diversity should fit the community and identity needs, existential situations, life stages, quest for human recognition, dignity and integrity of those whom we accompany in our practice of theological and religious education. This requires respectful openness and curiosity, moving in the direction of understanding and empathy, regarding what those in our care existentially face and with what they are coping. Promoting affiliational diversity is part and parcel of care for the life-determining dimensions of identity that people choose, are forced on them, and that they negotiate. Affiliational diversity as a goal of theological education, especially – to quote sociologist Patricia Hill Collins – must be the kind of "social theory" (and theology) that "for oppressed groups" can "provide moral authority to struggles for self-definition and self-determination," "resist[ing] disciplinary power relations and giv[ing] meaning to everyday life."[27]

By promoting affiliational diversity, I do not mean only teaching about other paths in addition to those of an educational institution's sponsoring religious tradition, as crucial as that is today. I mean beginning our practice anew each time with the people we serve, and learning about paths that are considered normative and nonnormative but that may matter for them, whether that be other religions in the singular or in combination, whether that be new religious movements, or whether that be noneness. I mean educating to facilitate encouragement and freedom for others to be highly affiliated, moderately affiliated, or nonaffiliated with the sponsoring tradition or another tradition or multiple traditions or no tradition. This practical theological and religious education can become something that helps people and communities say a more free yes to their own lives, to grow toward meeting their personal and social moment, in a socially and existentially responsive spirituality. This yes is not only for those in our care. One's yes and freedom for a yes is entangled with others. This yes to life is only a responsibly social yes insofar as it fosters freedom for a yes in others, most imperatively those whose yeses are imperiled. This is an education to encourage people being who they need to be, to love who and what they need to love, such that others' freedom for a good life is ennobled.

Such a practice will be more like nondirective, personal-stakes-aware, power-sensitive and sacred-power-redistributive models of community organizing, spiritual direction, and chaplaincy: accompanying people in clarifying what they want in their relationship to their claiming power, and how they get it; tracing effectiveness by how we facilitate people gaining freedom in thinking through their possibilities for faith and life, and letting them go where they need to go, encouraging our students and parishioners and children and those in our care to befriend and to love whom they are drawn to, unafraid of being changed by friendship, unafraid of being changed by love. Affiliational diversity means, especially for younger generations, the freedom

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[27] Patricia Hill Collins, *On Intellectual Activism* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013), 26.

to love and be loved inside and outside and on the edge of the inherited religious or nonreligious fold.[28]

There is no quick fix, because the deeper change is a matter of how educators are formed and supervised, and that takes time and institutional resources. Yet there are a number of things that those who inherit the social situation I sketch above and who are at least partly persuaded by this vision can consider. Promoting affiliational diversity will mean that those of us who teach and have responsibility for formation teach not only out of what we consider to be the normative heart of the tradition, but also the tradition's nonnormative margins: its dissenters, doubters, half-believers, and leavers. Affiliational diversity invites educators to teach not only the official stances, but the varieties of lived religion in context. This means that as educators, we need to learn better how people actually hold life together, and teach from that. Just so, we can try to cultivate the courage to teach our own uncertainties, doubts, and questions. Instead of defending a religious teaching as universally applicable, we can reframe teachings as the actions of teachers and take that occasion to present ourselves as in process, in transition, as capable of changing our minds, as on the beautiful and difficult discovery process of adulthood. We can choose to teach our changing relationship to what we have discovered matters in life. Educators also have a lot to learn from the practices of parents whose children affiliate differently than they do, and from friends who weather deep religious or spiritual changes but maintain and even deepen their friendship. We need substantial research about this, as well as encouraging frank discussions of it in our educating.

Theologian Hosffman Ospino's advocacy of interculturality suits this approach.[29] According to Ospino, interculturality means that "members of all cultures in a diverse context fully participate in the construction of knowledge[.] Interculturality is an invitation to confront dominant models of action and reflection that dismiss, consciously or unconsciously, the voices, stories, experiences and ideas that are present in culturally diverse contexts. Interculturality engenders hope insofar as it affirms the potential of culture, as well as the agency of every human person, in their own particularity, to journey as architects of culture in the here and now of their historical existence."[30] While I affirm Ospino's call for intercultural attention in service of a shift to a predominantly Hispanic/Latino/Latina-membership Catholic Church in the United States, a shift that is evident in my home base in New York City, Ospino acknowledges but underplays the rise in disaffiliation, or what he

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[28] On this point, I learn from the research and pastoral example of Bishop Yvette Flunder, *Where the Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

[29] Hosffman Ospino, "You Too Go Out Into the Vineyard: Ministerial Formation in a Culturally Diverse Church," in *Transforming Ministry Formation*, eds. Edward P. Hahnenberg, Marti R. Jewell, and Theodore James Whapham (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2021), 95-121.

[30] Ospino, "You Too Go Out Into the Vineyard," 104-105.

refers to as secularism and defection, as major forces with which to contend.[31] I think there is room in Ospino's intercultural approach for learning from nonnormative affiliation within and across cultures.

The practical theology of nonnormative affiliation calls for a historical-pastoral approach to disaffiliation, where three things happen: [1] "religious institutions accept disaffiliation as a dramatic present reality and adjust their footprint and plans accordingly," [2] educators listen to young people and "share their own pain, fears and doubts" instead of moralizing about participating in church, and [3] pastoral leaders "grapple honestly" with what their own churches have done to help cause disaffiliation.[32] Just as I would like to see Ospino's intercultural approach bridge to nonnormative affiliation within and across cultures, I would like to see Hoover's historical-pastoral approach connected explicitly to the Catholic cultural diversity of which Hoover has previously written.[33]

The practical theology of nonnormative affiliation articulated in this chapter, leavened by Ospino's and Hoover's research, suggests that white male educators in the United States like me cannot effectively accompany persons of color in educational settings unless we work to understand what changing affiliations mean in our own and our students' cultural contexts. This entails reckoning with paternalistic and colonial legacies built into our assumptions and practices regarding how we teach and mentor regarding what religion, affiliation and disaffiliation mean. It is easy for educators who are part of (reproducing) the taken-for-granted normativity structure in theological education to stop listening and learning, to take refuge in "knowing better."

At the same time, the larger culturally diverse conversation in Catholic-heritage education cannot avoid engaging the question of how to promote nonnormative affiliations. This option will require many white educators, including me, to take care in learning about what those in our care want and need, and it may challenge many of us to not make assumptions about what different racial and ethnic groups and persons must or must not become religiously. Speaking frankly about affiliational diversity is often threatening in religious-heritage institutions. Educators collaborating interculturally about creative pedagogical responses to the new realities of affiliation across all people groups may help to overcome institutional ignorance, resistance, and shaming about emerging affiliational diversity.

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[31] Ospino, "You Too Go Out Into the Vineyard," 95.

[32] Brett C. Hoover, "Evaluating the Moral Framing of Disaffiliation: Sociological and Pastoral Perspectives on the Rise of the 'Nones'," *Religions* 12, no. 386 (2021): 1-13, at 10.

[33] Hoover, "Evaluating the Moral Framing of Disaffiliation," and Brett C. Hoover, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of US Catholicism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

Do Not Freeze Nones in Place

Fully reckoning with affiliational diversity will require developing the nones-category further in our educating, problematizing it, and doing theologies that trouble the binary options between none and all, none and some, in and out, Catholic/Christian and "other." This will best be done without running over people's experience and relapsing into a stance of "official theology knows best." For theoretical, theological, and personal reasons, I have never been entirely comfortable with the category "none": theoretically, because of the way it puts none in unhelpful binaries with some and all; theologically, because "none," "nothing," and similar terms have often been positive and meaningful in theological traditions; personally, because empirical accounts of religion, faith, spirituality, and identity, including mine, do not conform neatly to such basic contrasts.

Exemplifying the limitations introduced by the language of "nones," theologian Michelle Gonzalez writes about her family's Guatemalan Catholicism, curious about how it sits outside the expectations of Latino and Latina Catholic theologies. Her family's ritual practices draw from diverse indigenous practices, including Mayan-heritage folk practices to heal ailments called evil eye; recognizing the Virgin Mary's close proximity to the divine manifestation Oshun in the Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria, a West African Yoruba heritage; and seances to call upon spiritual powers for healing, part of Espiritismo, a complex melding of French mysticism, nonelite local Catholicism, African-heritage religions, and indigenous traditions, giving access to a world of spirits active for human healing or harm. Gonzalez writes that "the everyday religious practices of Latina/o Catholics stretch beyond the confines of official doctrinal Catholicism." She asks whether Latina/o theologians can recognize the "theological value" of this complexity.[34] Gonzalez' work does not obey the grid for identity that "none" versus "some" or "all" suggests, sitting orthogonally in relation to those who want clarity about "in" or "out." Instead, Gonzalez provides a theologically rich, reflective, critical and personal account of how people hold life together.

Still, I understand why people might claim none for themselves and why researchers might want to employ it, especially in situations where religion has been experienced as a damaging or expiring force. In such places, like the United States, the category of none makes sense to me as a "No" to what is considered the assumed or default "whole," "all," or "some." It is a shorthand for identity in a time when people often need to have such shorthands at the ready. I think theological research and education benefit when we stay

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[34] Michelle A. González, "If It is Not Catholic, Is It Popular Catholicism? Evil Eye, Espiritismo, and Santería: Latina/o Religion within Latina/o Theology," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latino/a Theology and Philosophy*, eds. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 151-168.

curious about what people mean by "none" and what invoking it makes possible.

Finding the None in Ourselves

For those who find the matters addressed here salutary for our practice, a robust reckoning with affiliational diversity may also entail the intellectual, spiritual and political courage to find that within us that shares in the life of nones: finding the nothing, the none, within ourselves and our traditions.

I am inspired by some theologians' arguments that theology is so inseparable from the situation of relative empowerment and disempowerment of the theologian that theologians should convey how their research creatively reworks that empowerment and disempowerment. Theologian Courtney Goto calls this the importance of the theologian articulating their "epistemic advantage," or the perspective earned from the journey toward humanness as experienced from social marginalization that gives insight into the larger workings of practices that are theologically significant. This powerful angle on reality, Goto argues, may be forced unwillingly on one, but can also be learned by relatively advantaged persons in solidarity with marginalized peoples. In Goto's book *Taking On Practical Theology*, my work is named as an example of using my Catholic academic theological privileges to do theology that responds to the abuse and coverup crisis in the Catholic Church.[35] When I wrote the work to which Goto is referring, it is true that I thought of myself and allowed myself to be identified as a Catholic theologian. However, I soon after made an existential-political decision to disidentify with, to disaffiliate from Catholicism, and it may well be that my Catholicism was already breaking within that book. I described some of my affiliational fracturing in an essay titled "Curated Freefall," published in 2013. In it, I reflect on how the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, perhaps paradoxically, helped me discern my way to leaving Catholicism, a midlife clarification in saying yes to my life.[36]

The most relatively adequate name for what I have become is a none, although I do not feel entirely at home in that category. My theological career since then has been marked by this transition and the growth outward. I do not surrender my Catholic heritage, but I take its mixed effects on me into a more fulsome environment, a more expansive dwelling. I have had to learn the difference between roots and refuge, although I do not have a name for this more spacious habitation.[37] Sometimes, as Jesuit writer and Zen teacher

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[35] Goto, *Taking on Practical Theology*, 203-204.

[36] Tom Beaudoin, "Curated Freefall: Ignatius of Loyola," in *Not Less Than Everything: Catholic Writers on Heroes of Conscience from Joan of Arc to Oscar Romero*, ed. Catherine Wolff (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 11-21.

[37] I wrote this poem in 2017: "There's a root / It's not the deepest root / It's in the way of holding up the shelter / It comes out with some work and the right tools / Whatever can be taken away isn't permanent / Take out all the roots you need to build the shelter / Refuge over roots"

Robert Kennedy asserts, "Faith demands the destruction of what faith built."[38]

I think that most Christian theologians, especially those who work in theological education, who have had analogous experiences, have kept it to themselves out of shame and fear of the institutional consequences for revealing it. It seems that the inability of the churches to make positive sense of the nones is mirrored in the silence of theologians in Catholic-heritage institutions who are nones or bear other nonnormative identities. It is from this "place" that I do theology, and I say this to encourage this discourse to grow, because I am far from the only one. This too is part of the theological reckoning with affiliational diversity: understanding and revising how Catholic and other religious-heritage institutions deal with their nones within.

I believe theology has a role to play in the persons, communities, and institutions we become. One intention of my theology is to connect inherited powers with novel situations to foster a new yes to life, and that means asking how Catholic-heritage institutions can serve what people actually need today to say yes. People have a right to say yes and tend the mystery of their own lives. In the words of French poet René Char, "A new mystery sings in your bones / develop your legitimate strangeness."[39]

My journey into none-ness has freed me to accompany students from a wide array of affiliations to go deeper in their practice, to find the next horizon of courage in their theology. Instead of taking me away from the mission of the Catholic-and-Jesuit-heritage university in which I work, I have found myself even more available to a range of students, sensitive to their searching, to their silences, and to their capacities to come to terms with themselves and their world. Often, students who are between worlds find me. These students frequently create scholarship and art that cannot be featured in the university's official media or given normative institutional endorsement but that changes their and others' lives. In some ways this is all merely following the lead of the Second Vatican Council in commending Catholics to "recognize, preserve, and promote" the "good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among" religiously diverse persons, not only in "dialogue" but also in "collaboration."[40]

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[38] "Buddhist Christian Dialogue in Action: Boston 1992," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rcNuSt5RNo. The transcript is at http://innerexplorations.com/catew/1.htm.

[39] René Char, "Partage Formel / Formal Share," in René Char, *Furor and Mystery and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Mary Ann Caws and Nancy Kline (Boston, MA: Black Widow Press, 2011), 115.

[40] Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html

Rereading Ignatius of Loyola

Because I have been educated in Jesuit-heritage institutions and have taught in them for decades, I conclude with a new theological reading of the "Suscipe" prayer from the 4th week of the *Spiritual Exercises* attributed to Ignatius of Loyola, an interpretation to complement my Pantheonic investigation and to further embed the reckoning with affiliational diversity that is the focus of this chapter in the Ignatian tradition.

In this famous prayer, read now in the light of the realities of religious disaffiliation and under the canopy of the Pantheon, we can see the figure of Ignatius taking a profound spiritual risk, as the text says, "making an offering of myself": As the famous prayer has it, "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess."[41] In other words, we may now read this as suggesting that everything that has kept Ignatius connected to Christ, to the church – all his investment in what we would call religious affiliation – is contemplated as standing released. The prospect of surrendering every tie, including every allegiance to a faith tradition, is under consideration.

The surrender is emphasized by the lines, "You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will."[42] Nothing pertaining to memory, understanding and will – including the promises that religious affiliation was supposed to guarantee, the identity it was supposed to secure – nothing is at the disposal of the one praying this prayer.

I am suggesting neither a literal reading of the *Exercises*, as if the *Exercises* are Ignatius' actual reports of his own practice, nor that Ignatius intended in his time to contemplate being a none. Rather, I think the prayer itself has a potency that meets this moment of the nones in a salutary way.

Yet in the tarrying with none-ness offered in the "Suscipe," we immediately see how frightening the prospect of promoting affiliational diversity really is, of letting loose the affiliations that were supposed to tell us who we are. We have an extraordinary moment in this prayer, a striking possibility, even if the surrender cannot be sustained for more than a moment. Indeed, what we read next tells us that Ignatius is ambivalent about staying spiritually indifferent to affiliation. Ignatius pulls back partway from the brink, begging, "Give me Your love and your grace, for this is sufficient for me."[43] What has taken place here? Are God's love and grace meant to decompose the old, constitutive church affiliations – or are they effectively substitutes out of the fear of becoming none? This moving ambivalence at what is often considered the apex of the Spiritual Exercises gives us a glimpse of the prospect of

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[41] Ignatius of Loyola, "The Spiritual Exercises," in *Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. George Ganss (New York: Paulist, 1991), 121-214, at 177.

[42] Ignatius of Loyola, "The Spiritual Exercises," 177.

[43] Ignatius of Loyola, "The Spiritual Exercises," 177.

spiritual indifference toward affiliation. It is there for a moment; does it evaporate?

This Ignatian space for affiliational diversity, space for spiritual indifference to affiliation, is a Pantheonic space, making space for those who will stay, those who will hang out when they can, and those who are just passing through.

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Part III

**Central-European Perspectives on
the Beliefs of Nonbelievers**

West and East: Europe's Dual Experience

Tomáš Halík

When we speak of East and West in relation to Europe, the terms usually have a cultural and political sense rather than a geographical one. Originally, these terms marked a difference between Greek and Latin Christianity. During the Cold War, Europe was divided politically into the East, which denoted the countries under the Soviet diktat, and the West, which was under the influence of the United States. *As a result, the terms West and East acquired a new meaning*. After the fall of communism, the process of European integration accelerated. Politicians spoke about "a common European home," and Pope John Paul II talked about "Europe breathing with both its lungs." It seems now that those visions reflected an over-optimism. It is very difficult, today, to find a compromise between a conservative concept of Europe based on nostalgia for a Christian Europe, and secular liberal concept of Europe. Clearly, on both sides, there are prejudices, "enemy images," and fears of the possible destructive consequences if the other side were to totally dominate the public space.

Thus, the continuation of the European integration process is encountering major difficulties. The West underestimates the dangers from Putin's Russia, which is waging intensive hybrid warfare buoyed by a propaganda campaign of disinformation, aimed chiefly at the post-communist countries – long before the military aggression against Ukraine. The integration process is torpedoed by nationalists and populists who are enjoying success on both sides of the former Iron Curtain, particularly in post-communist countries such as Hungary and Poland, where they are gradually destroying the liberal democracy that failed to establish deep roots in the previous decades. The crisis of European integration is related, of course, to the crisis of a broader process, of which European unification was one aspect – the process of globalization.

One of the slogans of the peaceful revolutions of 1989 expressed the yearnings and political and cultural endeavors of several generations of the region's inhabitants: Back to Europe! Back to the West where we belong! It now seems that, for many people, this slogan simply expressed their longing to sit at the abundantly spread table of the economically prosperous societies and enjoy all the benefits and privileges of political and economic liberalism. But, as it turns out, democracy is not simply a political system that can be quickly established by the introduction of political and economic institutions. Rather, democracy is a *political culture* that requires a thoroughgoing and challenging transformation of how people think and behave, as well as a change of value orientation and the overall moral climate. Democracy is, above all, a specific culture of relations among people.

Communism cultivated a type of human that the Russian writer Zinoviev called "*homo sovieticus*" – someone lacking initiative, creativity, and responsibility. The secret of communism's lengthy endurance was the unwritten pact between the rulers and the ruled: so long as citizens passively conformed and did not demand their rights and freedoms, the regime guaranteed them a certain level of social security and freed them from the burden of decision making. In the mid-1980s, the communist system was unable to ensure its citizens this promised standard of living. Hence, the unwritten pact between the communist rulers and the citizens lost its material and psychological foundations. The communism ship had sprung a leak, as it were, and was slowly starting to founder. This happened at the time of a favorable international constellation: the West had determined opponents of communism in Reagan and Thatcher, and the Soviet Union did not survive Gorbachev's attempt to re-run the Prague Spring, i.e., a moderate liberalization of the communist system. Pope John Paul II played a key role through his knowledge of communism, and his support for European unification from the Atlantic to the Urals with his vision of Europe breathing with both of its lungs. But Europe's Eastern "lungs" turned out to be so damaged by communism that the fulfilment of the dream of a unified Europe required a far lengthier and more radical therapy than people had expected at the turn of the 1990s.

I am convinced that *the main role in the collapse of the communist system was played by the globalization process.* When a free market of goods and ideas was created, the communist systems, with their state-planned economies and censorship of culture, were soon stifled in the fierce wind of competition. Comparison with Western products that slowly entered the Eastern markets demonstrated the backwardness of socialist economies. Moreover, when Western culture – from philosophy to pop music – increasingly penetrated the communist world with the development of communications technology, communism's cultural products proved to be unattractive, especially to the younger generation.

However, the globalization process has a paradoxical impact: it both overcomes and intensifies disparities. Globalization only seems to introduce uniformity (such as the spread of Western mass consumer culture), whereas, in reality, it actually tends to divide: it favors those who are prepared and destroys those who are not; it provides an opportunity for open systems and brings about the demise of closed ones.

At the beginning of the 1990s, essentially two groups of people took power. The former dissidents and active opponents of communism were very visible, such as Václav Havel and Lech Wałesa, the Polish workers' leader. But there was another less visible group who held onto power longer, namely, that part of the former communist elites who alone possessed the capital of money, contacts, and information. They were, above all, the ones who had contacts in the political police, the most effective component of the communist regimes. Thus, the last communists became the first capitalists. Those elites first took control of the business sector and, from there, started to exert

their influence in politics. First in Russia and then in a number of other post-communist countries, gangs of oligarchs with no moral scruples at all formed the economic – and, hence, also the political – elites. They were most successful where there had been a failure to establish the rule of law, and where civil society was weak.

The situation has become particularly dramatic in the recent decade, during which the entire globalization process has seemingly entered a crisis. The downside of globalization is revealing itself, with a widening gap between rich and poor countries, and between the rich and poor within those countries. The globalization process has brought to the fore new elites; however, those who suffer from a lack of recognition are amassing to resist them.

Those who have suffered because their voices have not been heard and they have not been taken seriously have been given the instrument of resistance they need – new social networks. Every major cultural change is generally accompanied by, or even brought about by, a change in the field of communication. Book printing enabled the development of modernism and Protestantism. The radio enabled the rise of the twentieth-century dictators. What would Hitler, Goebbels, and Mussolini have been without radio? Television transformed democratic political competition into entertainment. In the twenty-first century, from the United States to Italy and Ukraine, apparent clowns have quickly and easily attained the pinnacles of power. Politics has ceased to exist in its traditional form; it has, instead, been swallowed up by both the economy and the entertainment industry, enabled by the current internet age. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe did not enter this internet age until the fall of communism. The new (virtual) social networks now play a major role in disseminating the "liquid anger" of frustrated sections of society. Less educated people and part of the older generation, in particular, suffer from a sense of disorientation in today's complex world. These moods are expertly exploited by populist groups who help to channel this liquid anger and look for culprits and enemies. They offer simple solutions to complex questions. Populists know how to express precisely the opinions of people who do not think.

It is especially in the post-communist countries that migrants and Muslims in general have become the favorite objects of fear and hate, together with so-called deviant groups such as the Roma or homosexuals. Some of the campaigns directed against those who are considered different are reminiscent of anti-Semitism in pre-war Germany; indeed, anti-Semitism is also returning in places. In some cases, these groups even receive the support of conservative Christians and church leaders. Pope Francis, in contrast, vigorously reminds us that solidarity with people on the fringes is at the heart of Jesus' message.

The expansion of populism in Europe has been fostered in part by the decline of the family and its influence in terms of education and upbringing, and in part by the related identity crisis and the powerful entertainment industries, which stifle the ability to think critically. Commercial *entertainment* works like an anxiolytic drug. This era of anxiety encourages the develop-

ment of both chemical and spiritual drugs – both those that inhibit reason and conscience and those that promote aggression. Various kinds of religion are emerging that are "the opium of the people," according to Karl Marx's famous definition, and the opposite is also true: opium has become the religion of the people.

Religion and Nationalism

A typical anxiety in the age of globalization is a *fear of loss of identity* on the part of both individuals and groups. This fear arouses a new type of aggressive nationalism, one that frequently makes use of religious symbols, emotions, and rhetoric. For a long time, the West believed that the danger of a union of religion and political power was prevented by the principle of the separation of church and state. However, the situation has changed because nation states have now lost their monopoly of politics, and the churches have lost their monopoly of religion. Supra-national forces are now becoming involved in political life in the form of powerful economic corporations as well as international civic initiatives and NGOs. The linking of religion and nationalism is nothing new in the history of Europe.

The phenomenon of "Catholicism without Christianity," a trend which is now coming back to life, also merits attention. In certain circles, Catholicism – not Christianity – has become attractive. Catholicism, in this trend, is regarded as an example of a closed authoritarian system and an alternative to liberalism, liberal democracy, and the entire culture and civilization that grew out of Humanism and the Enlightenment. We can find the origins of this trend among the conservative opponents of the French Revolution, in Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism, and also, later, in Charles Maurras, the founder of Action Française, or Carl Schmidt, a Nazi fellow-traveler. This trend is reappearing today among the nationalist opponents of the European Union and populists who misuse religious rhetoric. Catholicism, in this respect, can be used to describe the form of the Catholic Church and theology that was created in opposition to Protestantism, and particularly to the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the nineteenth-century revolutions. The Catholic Church in the United States was far less affected by these traumas or the fear of modern culture and, therefore, underwent a different development. European Catholicism took a long time to heal itself from the trauma caused by the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution.

This trend of Catholicism is an expression of resistance and defense against secularization, but it also unwittingly contributes to the secularization process. First of all, the Church lost a large part of working class when it failed to react in a timely way to the consequences of the Industrial Revolution and Marxist socialism. Then, in its crusade against modernism, it lost a large part of the educated sections of the population. Thus, just when it was necessary to react creatively to developments in science and philosophy, Catholicism committed intellectual self-castration. In its resistance to the

legacy of the Enlightenment, nineteenth-century Catholicism joined forces with Romanticism and fell prey to nostalgia for medieval *Christianitas* or, more accurately, to a utopian vision of the Middle Ages created by Romantic literature. Romanticism was also a source of inspiration for Catholic nationalism, such as Polish messianism or French conservatism.

At one time, it seemed that the experiences of World War II had discredited for good the attempts of certain Christians to join forces with nationalism and authoritarian regimes. However, populists in the Visegrad countries now often employ Christian rhetoric and, when in power, they try to corrupt the Church by offering it various material benefits and privileges. The convergence of populist politicians and certain circles of the Church is driving intellectuals, and the younger generation in particular, away from the Church. In Poland, above all, the Church risks a dramatic loss of credibility: "Catholic Poland" might end up following the similar process of rapid and radical secularization undergone by other traditionally Catholic countries such as Ireland.

There are attempts to create an alliance between the conservative bishops of the Visegrad countries in order to hamper the reforms of Pope Francis, which would be fully in tune with the efforts of the populists in the governments of those countries to hamper the process of European integration. It is noteworthy that in its efforts to use the Catholics of the post-communist countries to destroy the EU, the American Right is in tune with the policies of Putin's Russia.

Developments after Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) became an expression and symbol of the Catholic Church's change of strategy towards the contemporary world. I would call it a *shift from Catholicism to Catholicity.* Towards the end of the Council, a number of bishops signed a Catacomb Pact whereby they pledged to get rid of expressions of Church triumphalism and clericalism, and be a poor church, and a church at the service of the poor.

The idea of an open, ecumenical church undoubtedly resonated with the anti-authoritarian mentality of the Second Enlightenment of the 1960s. When the fruit of that mentality turned out to be, in dramatic fashion, the cultural revolution of 1968, which included a sexual revolution, the reaction of certain Catholic circles was similar to the Church's response when the eighteenth-century Enlightenment gave rise to the French Revolution and Jacobin terror. A controversy arose among theologians between the "hermeneutics of continuity" and the "hermeneutics of discontinuity" when interpreting the documents and significance of Vatican II.

During the pontificates of the two non-Italian popes in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, reforms of Church structures slowed down and sometimes stopped; this also applied to changes in certain aspects of Church teaching and pastoral practice

expected after the Council. In other areas – such as inter-religious dialogue and overcoming Eurocentrism – developments continued to take the course mapped out by the Council.

The reaction of Church authorities to the liberalization of sexual behavior stemming from the sexual revolution was to adopt rigorous stances with orthodoxy as the main criteria, rather than to conduct a more thorough study of these phenomena and support a more sensitive, differentiated approach, including greater respect for individual conscience. Now, in order to be a good Catholic or suitable candidate for bishop, one had to loudly condemn the use of condoms and same-sex relationships, defend priestly celibacy, and demand the criminalization of abortions. The sexuality and reproduction agenda gradually shifted to the center of Church teaching and preaching. The contradiction between the demands of the Church and the actual practices of believers in these areas contributed to the gradual corrosion of loyalty among many Catholics towards the institutional form of the Church, as well as towards its teaching, and resulted in a decline in regular and frequent church attendance. A significant number of Catholics in the West also stopped practicing the sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Church's excessive emphasis on sexual morality evoked a natural reaction among the secular public: Look to your own ranks first! During the pontificate of Benedict XVI, and especially after 2017, there was a wave of disclosures of long-concealed cases of sexual abuse of children and young people by Catholic priests. Nobody had suspected the enormous number of these cases, of course. In addition to this, further similar news emerged: there existed a homosexual lobby in the upper echelons of the hierarchy, there were unacknowledged children fathered by clergy, and there was spiritual manipulation in the training of candidates for the clergy. Pope Francis, who previously had the courage to call the excessive emphasis on sexual issues a "neurotic obsession," displayed similar courage when seeking the root causes of these shocking phenomena. He declared that sexual abuse was and is an aspect of the abuse of power and authority in the Church and an expression of clericalism.

Most bishops in Western Europe took the side of Pope Francis in this matter, while in the post-communist countries, as well as in a large part of the Church outside of Western civilization (particularly Africa), many bishops have had a tendency to make light of these problems. This is motivated particularly by a fear that the efforts to overcome clericalism in those churches might revive a reform process in the spirit of Vatican II – *a process of transition from Catholicism to Catholicity*, from a closed system to ecumenical openness. Part of Eastern European episcopates have never entirely trusted that process; they point to the fact that it was precisely after Vatican II that the churches, convents, and priestly seminaries in the West started gradually to fall empty.

In the East, in the countries under communist regimes, the repression of religion had the paradoxical effect of slowing down that process. Pressure from the regime aroused resistance so that believers felt a moral and psy-

chological commitment to be loyal to the Church and its leadership. External pressure cemented inner unity. Solidarity with the persecuted also raised the Church's moral authority in society, as well as its attractiveness, particularly for the youth and intellectuals who rejected communist ideology.

After the collapse of communism, particularly in places where the Church quickly became part of the establishment, that psychological barrier towards secularization fell away. A process of turning away from churches began to manifest itself in those countries, albeit not everywhere at the same pace and intensity. The former unity within the Church, resulting from external pressure, gave way to a natural diversity. However, many clergy and laypeople were unaccustomed to a diversity of ways of experiencing and expressing faith, and were unprepared for conflicting opinions and criticism of authority.

Likewise, the present wave of traditionalism, which is more powerful in the churches of the post-communist countries than in the West, is evidence of theological and pastoral unpreparedness for the action of the Church in secular society. For example, it would seem that when the explanation of the Jesuit order's Universal Apostolic Preferences activity in 2019 states that secular society is a sign of the times, which affords the order an opportunity to develop and intensify the Church's pastoral activity, the episcopal authorities in the post-communist countries have not yet grown ears for such a message.

The Spirit of Vatican II and the Experience of the Underground Church

In the countries with communist regimes, the reforms in the spirit of Vatican II proceeded much more slowly than in the West. When they started to be applied in the Czech Catholic Church, for instance, where they concerned chiefly the reform of the liturgy, they were implemented by priests who, for the most part, had no opportunity to familiarize themselves with theological thinking of the previous decades, i.e., the thinking that had created the intellectual context for the Council and its reforming endeavors. The lack of knowledge of that context meant that the changes were inevitably very superficial. It is not very surprising that a section of the clergy and laity of the next generation would take a negative stance towards the superficial modernization of the Church – although some of them would react similarly to superficial traditionalism.

Nevertheless, there were certain groups of clergy and laity in the Czech Church who became convinced proponents of the Vatican II reforms: *paradoxically, it was particularly those who had been most isolated from the Church at the time of the Council, and who, from the beginning of the 1950s, languished in prisons and forced labor camps*. But it was there that some of them underwent a profound change of mentality and spirituality. It was a

totally different change than the one that their jailers intended with their re-education methods.

The priests and Catholic intellectuals who were given lengthy prison sentences in the show trials of the 1950s would meet in prison with people with whom they had never before come into closer contact – with Christians of other churches, with proponents of liberal humanism, and with non-conformist communists who had been excommunicated and persecuted by their own comrades. It was there that practical ecumenism came into being: those people understood each other and realized that what they had in common was more important than their differences. It was there that the clergy tried to celebrate the liturgy and sacraments in extreme conditions, without any pomp or triumphalism. And it was those experiences that led them to discern what was the real heart of Christianity. Some of the imprisoned clergy understood and accepted the cross of suffering not as an act of injustice on the part of the communists but in the spirit of the biblical prophets as divine pedagogy – as a path of cleansing and penitence for the former triumphalism of a church linked to power (especially in the time of the Austrian monarchy). Some of them dreamed that if the Church were to be free again one day, it would have to be a changed church – a poor, serving Church, ecumenically open, with a simple, profound, and comprehensible liturgy. When they were released from prison in the second half of the 1960s, news first reached them about the Second Vatican Council, and they recognized in it the yearnings that had been born in their minds and hearts at the time of their persecution.

From the ranks of these priests emerged those who would try to spread the message of Vatican II in the brief period of political liberalization during the so-called Prague Spring. In Czechoslovakia, the period of hope of liberalization of the regime (the ideal of the Prague Spring was "socialism with a human face") coincided with hopes for the renewal of the Church, and a degree of declericization (some spoke about "Christianity with a human face"). The difference in the way Vatican II reforms were received in the West versus in the countries of the communist bloc first became evident the moment when the opportunities to travel in the late 1960s were relaxed and some Catholics from the communist countries were able to visit Western countries. Many of those who encountered post-Vatican II Catholicism in the West suffered a culture shock.

At this point, I would like to present my own personal testimony. Shortly after the Council, I first visited the West as a fresh and ardent convert as part of a university exchange program between Charles University in Prague and a Catholic university in the Netherlands. When I came across a poster at the university announcing a debate on the topic "God is dead and left his mausoleum, the Catholic Church," I experienced the critical Catholicism of the 1960s and I suffered a culture shock. As a consequence, I briefly joined the ranks of the conservative opponents to the Vatican II reforms.

A similar shock was in store for many Catholics who first encountered post-Vatican II Catholicism after the collapse of communism a quarter of a century later. I, myself, soon abandoned the stifling environment of Catholic

Integralism during the Prague Spring when I encountered the priests I have mentioned already: the ones who had recently come out of prison or labor camps, which had become for them a school of ecumenism and open Catholicism without the burden of clericalism and triumphalism. I am convinced that their understanding of the Council was much more profound and mature than the somewhat adolescent revolt against tradition that I had encountered a year earlier among Dutch students. Those priests became my teachers at the time of the second twenty-year period of Church persecution following the suppression of the Prague Spring by the Soviet military invasion. It was through meeting them that I was drawn into the ranks of the so-called "underground church" and my decision to serve as a priest in that milieu.

As secretly ordained priests of the underground church we had civilian occupations. In the group that I belonged to, we did not regard the combination of priesthood and a civilian lifestyle simply as a necessity imposed by external circumstances. In the spirit of the experience of our teachers – prisoners of communism – we tried to liberate our understanding of the Church and priestly ministry from all features of clericalism and triumphalism. What some of the fathers at Vatican II had pledged in the Catacombs Pact – i.e., renouncing all forms of ostentatiousness – was a given as far as we were concerned.

This hidden church was by no means a homogeneous organization. It consisted of various groups that often did not know of the others' existence. It included previously active priests who had been deprived of their permits to engage in priestly ministry, as well as priests secretly ordained by bishops in neighboring countries, particularly in Poland and East Germany, and also priests ordained in Czechoslovakia by secretly ordained bishops. Serving among us were also married priests with families. One of the bishops of the underground church, Felix Davídek, maintained that he was authorized by Rome to ordain married priests of the Latin Rite for the Eastern Rite, and he later ordained a number of women with a view to them serving in women's prisons at a time of persecution.

After the collapse of communism, those of us who had been secretly ordained by bishops in the surrounding communist countries where persecution was not as harsh as in Czechoslovakia, i.e., in Poland and East Germany, started to operate publicly in the Church without any great difficulty. Those who had been ordained by bishops who themselves had been secretly ordained in Czechoslovakia, and particularly the married priests, faced obstacles on the part of the Church hierarchy. The secret ordination of bishops in the 1950s and 1960s often took place in dramatic circumstances, when it was practically impossible to satisfy all the requirements of canon law. Some of the priests ordained by these bishops did not accept the offer of re-ordination *sub conditione*, and they continued to serve in communities reminiscent of the underground church at the time of persecution.

The many years of suppression of religion in the name of atheism, which became a militant pseudo-religion under the communist regimes, never resulted in an atheistic society, but traditional religion changed under condi-

tions of oppression. The loss of social privileges, and the falling away of conventional churchgoers with only a superficial belief, freed the Church in many respects by deepening and intensifying the belief of the faithful; moreover, the witness of the martyrs brought in many sympathizers and converts. In this sense, the age-old experience that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church" proved true.

Nevertheless, it must be added in the same breath that persecution and "exculturation" also had destructive consequences. Although a certain degree of persecution is beneficial to the Church, long-term severe persecution, and particularly isolation from the evolution of theological thinking, are damaging to it. In certain cases where religion is transformed into a counter-culture, the result is unhealthy ghettoization. Sometimes, the loss of free communication with the whole of society and its culture, as well as with the outside world and the Church in the free world, including developments in theology, etc., lead to intellectual rigidity. The need to be constantly on the defensive against external pressure results in a lack of self-criticism, while the need to close ranks creates the illusion of genuine unity of opinion. Whenever the fresh air of the free exchange of opinions is absent for a long time, there is a danger that things can become musty or even moldy.

After the collapse of the communist regimes, a considerable section of society had great expectations of the Church, but was disappointed. Many Christians found themselves unable to live without an enemy. After the collapse, they looked for a new enemy, and Western liberalism started to fill this role for them. The "released prisoner syndrome" assumed many forms in post-communist societies. In certain Christian circles, it took the form of agoraphobia, to borrow a term from psychopathology, in other words, an irrational fear of open spaces (literally, fear of the marketplace), and also paranoia, a sense of persecution and fear of the omnipresence of a dangerous Big Brother, which these Christians actually continued to carry within themselves.

Two types of missionaries soon appeared in the Czech Republic after the collapse of communism. The first consisted of fundamentalist Evangelical Christians from the United States, brandishing a bible in one hand and a hamburger in the other, who roared in stadiums with the expectation of mass conversion. The Czechs' natural skepticism could scarcely provide fertile soil for that kind of Christianity. The second type were conservative Catholics from the West who were convinced that the artificially isolated Church was a Snow White that was fortunate enough to have slept for several decades, including during the period of Vatican II reforms, and who were now arriving like Prince Charmings to awaken the Church in all its pre-modern beauty and gain a welcome ally against liberal theology in "the church of the martyrs." In certain Christian circles in the post-communist world, traditionalism and fundamentalism, the yearning for simple answers to complex questions has flourished. This panic-stricken religiosity has found support in nationalism, with the support of so-called powerful leaders, i.e., populists who claim to be saviors from the fear they themselves previously and artificially fueled. Since

about 2015, this fear has been chiefly focused on Islam and immigrants, although the important thing is the fear itself; it has always been possible to provide some motive for such fear.

At the end of the 1980s in the Czech Republic, a pastoral project emerged from the ranks of the underground church entitled, "The Decade of Spiritual Renewal." It intended to prepare society for an anticipated political and economic change. It sought to be a long-term thorough preparation of democracy's "moral biosphere." The Church would play the role of an institution whose striving to reform itself would contribute to the reform of society, and would inspire and mobilize all those who felt responsible for the moral health of society in favor of this broadly ecumenically conceived work of renewal. However, the collapse of communism came unexpectedly early, which took place in the second year of that initiative.

After the collapse, the majority of the Church was incapable of radically overcoming its institutional boundaries or giving priority to the common good and to society as a whole over its own interests. Instead of necessary reforms, particularly with respect to the education of clergy and laity, a mentality of restoration prevailed in the Church, and not just in Czechoslovakia, involving efforts to return as near as possible to the situation before the communist putsch a half-century before. With every passing year, the Church in the Czech lands has been losing sympathizers and active members, and is one of the lowest ranking institutions in terms of credibility and prestige.

In other post-communist countries, with the exception of Estonia, Latvia, and Eastern Germany, the process of secularization is slower and less visible. It is even possible to demonstrate with empirical data that the policy of "hard secularization" based on state-imposed atheism resulted in more moderate secularization than the policy of "soft secularization" pursued in most of the countries in Western and Northern Europe.

However, the idea that the East will evangelize the West through its example (according to Cardinal Meisner's favorite dictum "*Ex Oriente lux, ex Occidente luxus*") has proved to be an illusion. John Paul II often spoke of the need for the West and the East to "exchange gifts." When asked what they might mutually offer, one Slovak bishop answered that the West could send money, while the East could offer the example of an immaculately healthy faith. What the West should offer the churches in the post-communist countries is the experience of how to hold one's own in an open and pluralist society. The churches in the post-communist countries have yet to undertake thorough theological reflection on their experience during the period of repression.

If the current wave of populism in the post-communist countries, as well as in some countries of Western Europe, eventually passes, and if the European Union and liberal democracy survive the current onslaught and crises, one may assume that the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe will increasingly come to resemble Western Europe. *At that moment, the terms East and West will acquire a new meaning*. The East, specifically, will denote the orthodox countries, particularly Russia. These days, the

Russian Orthodox Church is seriously compromised and corrupted by its collaboration with the Putin regime, as well as with Russian nationalism and messianism. It is necessary, nevertheless, to study inspirational elements of Russian Orthodoxy, such as the emphasis on spirituality and the linking of theology, liturgy, and synodality in the conception of its church.

In conclusion, I would like to share some experiences that arouse hope as a way to contribute to reflection on the situation in the post-communist countries. Should one happen to visit a number of university parishes in the Czech Republic, one will find large churches full of young people – in what is regarded as the most atheistic country in Europe, if not the world. Every year, many young people are baptized in these parishes, and they are a seedbed for priestly and monastic vocations. The fact is, however, that many of these converts then find it hard to identify with the prevailing form of local churches. Nevertheless, I can bear witness to the fact that vital Christianity is possible in a highly secularized society. It is possible when we regard evangelization not as indoctrination, but as inculturation. It is possible when we do not wage a cultural war with the outside world, but try to understand the culture of our time and the questions that people around us are asking. It is possible when we do not lay claim to be possessors of the truth, but sincerely recognize that we do not have a monopoly on the right answers. It is possible when we present faith as a path of seeking, not as an ideology. It is possible when we are willing to accompany people, particularly young people, on their paths, and be seekers for seekers and questioners for questioners. We should resist the temptation to provide simple answers to complex questions, or offer a quick, easy, and cheap religious path without the intervention of critical thinking. I am convinced that the mission of Christians at this moment in history, and in this European culture, is not to offer certainties, but to teach the courage to enter the cloud of mystery and to live with life's open questions and paradoxes.

The most important service that the Church can offer people today is to develop the art of spiritual discernment in personal life and in the life of society, as well as in the theological hermeneutics of contemporary culture or, in traditional terms: reading the signs of the times.

Spontaneous Aversion to Religion: Preliminary Approaches

ANDRÁS MÁTÉ-TÓTH, KINGA POVEDÁK, and RÉKA SZILÁRDI

The issue of spontaneous emotional or cognitive aversion in the humanities concerns problems of stereotyping and prejudice. It has been discussed primarily in relation to concepts such as group formation, in-group–outgroup, and personal and social identity construction. From the Festinger model of social comparison[1] or the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner[2] to the empirical studies of experimental psychology,[3] social psychology has examined this issue extensively. In the last century's social science discourse, group identities and their boundaries have been elaborated in more ways, regarding either specific cases of large group identification (e.g., national identity) or small group identification against majority groups (e.g., ethnic, religious, worldview minorities).[4] Religious self-identity and related prejudices can thus provide a broad set of both large-group and small-group identification as well as segregation.

The model of spontaneous aversion to religion was inspired by the fact that there are aspects of atheism and noreligion in Central and Eastern Europe

[1] Leon Festinger, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," *Human Relations* 7, no. 2 (1954): 117-140.

[2] Henry Tajfel, "Csoportközi viselkedés, társadalmi összehasonlítás és társadalmi változás," in *Előítéletek és csoportközi viszonyok*, ed. György Csepeli (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1980), 25-39 and John C. Turner, "A társadalmi összehasonlítás és társadalmi azonosságtudat," in *Csoportlélektan*, ed. Ferenc Pataki (Budapest: Gondolat, 1980), 694-732.

[3] Muzafer Sherif, *Group Conflict and Co-operation: Their Social Psychology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) and Henry Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination," *Scientific American* 223 (1970): 96-102.

[4] See Michael Wohl and Nyla R. Branscombe, "Forgiveness and Collective Guilt Assignment to Historical Perpetrator Groups Depend on the Level of Social Category Inclusiveness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88 (2005): 288-303 (North American – Jewish – German); Michael Wohl and Nyla R. Branscombe, "Remembering Historical Victimization: Collective Guilt for Current In-group Transgressions," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94 (2008): 988-1006 (Israeli – Palestinian); Rezarta Bilali, "Identity Centrality and In-group Superiority Differentially Predict Reactions to Historical Victimization and Harm Doing," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 6, no. 2 (2012): 322-388 (North American – Japanese); Sabina Cehajic, Rupert Brown, and Emanuele Castano, "Forgive and Forget: Antecedents and Consequences of Intergroup Forgiveness in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Political Psychology* 29 (2008): 351-367 (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Luca Andrighetto, Silvia Mari, Chiara Volpato, and Burim Behluli, "Reducing Competitive Victimhood in Kosovo: The Role of Extended Contact and Common Ingroup Identity," *Political Psychology* 33, no. 4 (2012): 513-529 (Kosovo).

(CEE) that cannot be investigated or explained through a rational approach. In this paper, we try to conceptualize what we call spontaneous aversion to religion and explain what is behind this concept. If we understand the mechanism of this phenomenon, and the emotions and feelings associated with it, pastoral care can also benefit and can focus on spontaneous aversions rather than on philosophical rational atheism debates. Our paper aims to raise the issue of spontaneous aversion to religion and develop a new methodology that can approach this novel concept.

There is a conventional division of Europe into Eastern and Western subregions in social sciences and European public thinking. This division can mainly be traced back to the political decisions that followed World War II, dividing Europe into the American and Soviet zones, which significantly influenced the development of economic, military, and political relations. The division ceased to exist to some extent between 1989 and 1991. With the enlargement of the European Union to the East, a period of fundamentally different beginnings began. Nevertheless, the East–West divide still exists in public discourses and in social sciences, regardless of the extent to which research has shown that neither the Western nor the Eastern parts of Europe form a homogeneous unit.

In our paper, we deal with the characteristics of CEE atheism. By CEE, we mean a geographical location: the European countries of the former Soviet zone. Regarding this region, we argue that despite the political and economic changes of the 1990s, noreligion and atheism of the region can be distinguished from the atheisms experienced in Western European countries. We focus primarily on Central European countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary). In the first part of this paper, we illustrate that there are fewer atheists in CEE countries than in Western Europe and support this argument based on survey data. In the next step, we provide an explanation for this based mainly on historical contexts. Finally, we report on the observation of spontaneous aversion to religion, a new concept we propose to research. In our view, the possibility of dialogue with atheists in the CEE region is primarily limited by spontaneous aversion. Understanding this phenomenon can significantly contribute to an ability to increase dialogue.

Atheism in Cee – Data Analysis

If we look at atheism in CEE, we agree that "publications presenting recent research results from different Central and East European countries reflecting on the relation between religion and noreligion concerning the socialist period are relatively rare."[5] However, the statistics on the prevalence of atheism in Europe provide data for analysis. To provide a deeper understanding of data regarding atheism in CEE, the results of several independent

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[5] Jenny Vorpahl and Dick Schuster, eds., *Communicating Religion and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 2.

studies (Aufbruch, PEW Forum, European Values Study [EVS]) will be presented.

The EVS research results show that CCE countries have a higher degree of religiosity than Western European countries. Among CCE countries, the Czech Republic and Estonia stand out. Furthermore, although there are societies with a high level of nonbelievers in God, this does not usually mean that they can be characterized as atheist.

Responses to the question: *Do you believe in God?* (answers in %)

Country	Yes	No	N
Czech Republic	38.9	61.1	1624
Estonia	51.4	48.6	801
Sweden	53.4	46.6	884
Netherlands	61.1	38.9	980
France	61.5	38.5	1472
Slovenia	65.2	34.8	959
Bulgaria	66.2	33.8	875
Germany	67.8	32.2	1859
Hungary	68.1	31.9	952
Denmark	68.9	31.1	921
Russia	70.3	29.7	2108
Belgium	71.4	28.6	1776
Great Britain	71.8	28.2	839
Luxembourg	73.2	26.8	1125
Latvia	79.5	20.5	893
Ukraine	80.3	19.7	1039
Finland	82.5	17.5	928
Slovakia	82.8	17.2	1216
Belarus	82.9	17.1	871

Iceland	84.4	15.6	882
Lithuania	86.5	13.5	822
Spain	86.7	13.3	1122
Austria	86.8	13.2	1334
Croatia	91.6	8.4	976
Northern Ireland	93.2	6.8	946
Italy	93.5	6.5	1880
Greece	93.8	6.2	1101
Ireland	95.5	4.5	989
Romania	96.3	3.7	1090
Portugal	96.4	3.6	964
Poland	97.3	2.7	1082
Malta	99.5	0.5	999

Source: EVS Third Wave[6]

Based on research by the PEW Forum,[7] it can be stated that there are significantly fewer people in CEE countries who do not believe in God than in Western European countries.

However, these results highlight even more clearly the differences between the four countries we have highlighted in terms of a lack of belief in God. The proportion of nonbelievers in God is 8% in Poland, 27% in Slovakia, 30% in Hungary, and 66% in the Czech Republic.

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[6] Loek Halman, *The European Values Study: A Third Wave. Source Book of the 1999/2000 European Values Study Surveys* (Tilburg: Tilburg University, 2001), 86.

[7] Pew Research Center, "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues," https://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/pf-10-29-18_east-west_-00-12/ (accessed September 10, 2020).

Belief in God more widespread in Central and Eastern Europe

% who say they ...

	Believe in God	Believe in God, absolutely certain	Believe in God, less certain	Do not believe in God
Georgia	99%	73%	24%	1%
Armenia	95	79	16	4
Moldova	95	55	40	3
Romania	95	64	30	4
Bosnia	94	66	28	4
Greece	92	59	33	6
Serbia	87	58	29	10
Croatia	86	57	29	10
Poland	86	45	38	8
Ukraine	86	32	51	9
Belarus	84	26	58	9
Portugal	83	44	38	13
Bulgaria	77	30	47	17
Lithuania	76	34	41	11
Russia	75	25	48	15
Italy	73	26	46	21
Latvia	71	28	41	15
Ireland	69	24	44	26
Slovakia	69	37	31	27
Austria	67	13	53	29
Spain	64	25	38	31
Switzerland	62	11	51	33
Germany	60	10	50	36
Hungary	59	26	33	30
Finland	58	23	34	37
UK	58	12	45	36
France	56	11	45	37
Denmark	51	15	36	46
Norway	49	19	30	47
Estonia	44	13	31	45
Netherlands	44	15	28	53
Belgium	42	13	29	54
Sweden	36	14	22	60
Czech Republic	29	13	16	66

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries. Don't know/refused responses about belief in God or certainty of belief not shown. Muslim respondents in Western European countries were not asked this question.

Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Different Trajectories of Western and Eastern European Atheisms

When we speak of an atheist worldview, it is an expansive and complex reality. Sociological research using survey methods can capture certain dimensions of this complex reality. Typically, respondents are asked to identify which group they associate with concerning religion, either with the group called "atheist" or with the group called "convinced atheist." Yet, in the ques-

tion about belief in God, respondents are offered an alternative to rejecting belief in God: "there is no God," "I do not believe in God," and so on.

When discussing atheism in this study, we do not address two social groups: the nonbelievers and the agnostics. People not associated with any religious community are often associated with atheist positions, although the range of nonbelievers is much wider than that of atheists. Those who are indecisive on the question of God cannot be considered atheists but agnostics.

Respondents who have been identified by the sociological surveys as having atheistic backgrounds have opinions comparable to those of committed believers regarding several religious aspects, e.g., the social impact of religion, the role and significance of religious institutions, the priesthood, the responsibilities of believers, and so on. Atheism is predominantly present in Christian culture, but the literature on the phenomenon and characteristics of Jewish atheism is also rich, especially with respect to the Holocaust. The atheism of China or India is very different from the atheism observed in European culture. In this study, we only deal with atheism found in the European Christian social environment.

The atheist worldview expresses a way of thinking in a philosophical or sociological approach to knowledge, the main points of which can be summarized as the atheist mindset. This includes the following axiomatic statements contributing to the "canon" of the atheist mindset:

- There is no God.
- Religion is destructive and retrograde.
- The Christian church is anti-science and anti-progress.
- The main contributors to this canon include Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, and later, the so-called "New atheists," namely, Dawkins, Harris, Dennett, and Hitchens.

These theses are present in both Western European and CEE public thinking. The traditions of the social history of the two parts of Europe, in this sense, are partly the same and partly different. The differences are mostly marked by communist doctrine and dictatorship in CEE.[8] With regard to atheism in particular, the nationalization of schools, the harsh attacks on churches, the emphasis on the retrograde aspects of religion, and the building and positioning of a new materialist and atheist-minded elite were the measures that characterized the CEE atheist mindset.[9] Although the political transitions around 1990 showed a significant increase (up to 25-30%) in the

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[8] For further analysis, see Tomáš Bubík, Atko Remmel, and David Václavík, eds., *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2020) and Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[9] Here, with some restrictions, we can refer to the so-called homo sovieticus, as its specific features can be learned from the works of the Belarusian writer Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich.

data on religious affiliation in this region, in many of its mostly Orthodox majority countries, the declaration of denominational affiliation does not mean a change of mindset but, rather, a break with the past, and can be interpreted as a symbolic confession of national identity.

Today's atheism in CEE is not primarily manifested in an outright and loud denial of God. Instead, it is seen in a kind of ideology called new humanism, in which the human being is the measure of all things, especially in moral decisions, and in which the outlook on life based on scientific knowledge is the center of personal orientation. Today's atheism protests univocally against belief in biblical creation history and against homeopathic remedies because neither of these has a scientific explanation. Moreover, similarly, it rejects the competence of churches in the field of morality (primarily sexual and medical ethics) and all other ethical options that refer to religious tradition. In the past 30 years, post-communist atheist public thinking has moved away from the atheism imposed and violently demanded by the state and the party. Public thinking is increasingly feeding on atheist positions without region-specific traits through free European and global communica-tion channels.[10]

In 2014, two American non-academic specialist authors compiled a book about what the "10 Commandments of Atheism" could be. The book, entitled *Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart* by Lex Bayer and John Figdor,[11] summarizes the proposals the authors received in response to their call for possible commandments; a jury selected the most relevant responses, as noted below.

Atheists' New Ten Commandments:[12]

1. Be open-minded and be willing to alter your beliefs with new evidence.

2. Strive to understand what is most likely to be true, not to believe what you wish to be true.

3. The scientific method is the most reliable way of understanding the natural world.

4. Every person has the right to control of their body.

5. God is not necessary to be a good person or to live a full and meaningful life.

6. Be mindful of the consequences of all your actions and recognize that you must take responsibility for them.

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[10] Followers of New Atheism are presumably more numerous in Central Europe, especially in the post-regime socialized generation, than followers of the "old atheism" of communism.

[11] Lex Bayer and John Figdor, *Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart: Rewriting the Ten Commandments for the Twenty-first Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

[12] Daniel Burke, "Behold, Atheists' New Ten Commandments," *CNN*, December 20, 2014, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/19/living/atheist-10-commandments/index.html (accessed September 10, 2020).

7. Treat others as you would want them to treat you and can reasonably expect them to want to be treated. Think about their perspective.

8. We have the responsibility to consider others, including future generations.

9. There is no one right way to live.

10. Leave the world a better place than you found it.

Without interpreting the individual commandments, there are a few aspects to note. In the list of commandments, being a responsible person is the leading voice: proven, fact-based thinking and responsibility for your own life, body, and nature. The list does not include an explicit denial of God, only a relativization of God's significance for life management (5). It does not include history (unless the reference to new evidence indirectly refers to Galileo and Giordano Bruno) or any church (unless the right to control one's own body indirectly refers to the Christian churches' moral teachings on sexuality and abortion).

We can argue that the qualitative differences between atheisms in Eastern and Western parts of Europe are not necessarily more embedded in the "traditional atheistic" approach than in the "newer atheist" approaches. While the former has a high degree of synchronization, the latter has a large degree of difference. There are two fundamental features to which we would like to draw particular attention:

1) The contemporary culture of the CEE region is not dichotomous but plural, meaning there is a broader social and cultural environment in which we study the phenomenon of atheism, and includes pluralism within atheism itself.

2) The contents and reactions of atheism and contemporary atheist positions are closely related to the CEE region's wounded collective identity,[13] social borderline syndrome,[14] as well as ontological,[15] individual,[16] and social[17] uncertainty. Consideration of these defining framework theories is important in looking at the nature of communication that social and individual agents dealing with atheists can open. On the other hand, they also shed light on the boundaries that rational approaches point to and open up interest in atheist understandings of non-rational dimensions. With the methods of public opinion research (whether quantitative or qualitative) in atheism

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[13] András Máté-Tóth, *Freiheit Und Populismus: Verwundete Identitäten in Ostmitteleuropa* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019).

[14] Réka Szilárdi, Szilvia Kakuszi, and András Máté-Tóth, "Borderline társadalomzavar. Kísérletek a kelet-közép-európai társadalmak értelmezésére," *VALÓSÁG* 45, no. 3 (2022): 45-56.

[15] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[16] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

[17] Bryan S. Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights: Essays on Human Rights* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

research, it is necessary to develop items or interview guidelines that include these dimensions and contexts.

As also articulated by Bubík et al.:

> There was a shift during the 20th century that could be characterized as a shift from explicit, analytical, usually institutionalized atheism to deinstitutionalized indifferentism or apatheism […]. [A] typical "atheist" or "unbeliever" at the end of the 20th century and in the early 21st century is no longer a person with conscious and active opposition to religion and the institutions that represent religion. However, rather someone who ignores religion does not consider it important and, in some ways, actually does not understand it.[18]

Preliminary Approaches toward Spontaneous Aversion to Religion

In addition to the above, which focus on dimensions that can be recorded partly through opinion polls and partly described along the lines of atheist mindset theses, we consider it important to draw attention to the irrational, non-reflected dimension of the atheistic worldview. A system of prejudices can be traced through spontaneous statements, while ideologies and views are reflected along rational arguments and resolutions. The emotional presence of prejudices in atheism is rarely the subject of research, even though these prejudices play a larger role in human behavior and decision making than the reactions and patterns of behavior that result from deliberations and reflection. This type of atheism is called spontaneous atheism, a spontaneous aversion to religion and its various dimensions. We hypothesize that there is not a complete overlap between responses to worldview questions under different circumstances and spontaneous reactions. Furthermore, by looking at the different dimensions of religion, further dimensions are revealed within the atheist position. Exploring, researching, and analyzing these can greatly contribute to getting to know those who reject religion and, thus, increases the chances of social coexistence, which is also burdened by ideological tensions.

Spontaneous aversions and reactions to Smart's[19] seven dimensions of religion (ritual, narrative, experiential, institutional, ethical, doctrinal, and material) and to Glock's[20] five dimensions of religiosity (belief, experience, practice, theology, and ethics) presumably differ. There is a need to apply a

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[18] Bubík et al., eds., *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe.*

[19] Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

[20] Chales Y. Glock, "Über die Dimensionen der Religiosität," in *Kirche und Gesellschaft: Einführung in die Religionssoziologie*, ed. Joachim Matthes (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969), 150-168.

research method that focuses on the irrational appearance of religion on the one hand, and can record spontaneous reactions on the other hand. According to our plans, we elaborate an original method using photo-elicitation, which, due to the above conditions, also easily enables international and comparative research in the CEE region and beyond.

Spontaneous aversion to religion, in our provisional definition, is an innate and/or socio-culturally inherited aversion, a non-reflective and emotional attitude that inherently influences religion's relationship to us and our opinions. It is an aversion that is experienced on the individual level but remains unconscious and non-reflected. The implicit marker is meant to express the non-reflection of resentment, and the aversion is meant to express the negative position of rejection without a decision.

The source of a spontaneous dislike can derive from personality and/or the socio-cultural environment, such as religiously related negative experiences. The emotional charge of the feeling may be related to the severity of the trauma. A spontaneous aversion does not depend on demographic variables (age, gender, social status, educational level).

Spontaneous aversion is articulated mainly in sudden reactions to religious issues. As soon as this spontaneous reaction is articulated, the spontaneity of the dislike is shadowed by explanations. Spontaneous aversion is articulated in communication primarily during spontaneous, intrinsic, or implicit manifestations. In the case of interviews or texts on religion, the implicit nature of aversion is rarely observable due to the corrective control of communication.

Similar to spontaneous aversion to religion is the concept of "religious phobia," a political attitude especially visible in the United States, which is a fear of the increased presence of the combination of right-wing politics and traditional Christianity. The term religious phobia (religiophobia) in this sense was coined by the American rabbi and political activist Michael Lerner, founder of the magazine *Tikkun*. He has summarized his political views in his book *The Left Hand of God*.[21]

Another sense of spontaneous aversion to religion is Islamophobia. But in the very roots of the contemporary phenomenon, phobias of Muslim immigrants and right-wing Christians can both be detected in the same "fear from the return of religiosity to the public life's decision-making circles." The difference between the two kinds of religiophobia is "in terms of degree and circumstances, not in terms of roots and epistemic foundations."[22] Scientific atheism can also be considered as a third type of religiophobia,[23] with its clear

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[21] Michael Lerner, *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006).

[22] Najib George Awad, "Religio-Phobia: Western Islam, Social Integration and the Resurgence of Religiosity in Europe," *The Muslim World* 103, no. 4 (2014): 433-447.

[23] The Slovak author Martin Dojčár organized a scholarly conference in 2015 under the title: "Religiofóbia: Realita, prevencia a edukácia." See Martin Dojčár, ed., *Religiofóbia: realita, prevencia a edukácia* (Trnava: Trnavská univerzita, 2016).

objective to underpin the novelty and originality of the Bolshevik movement and then the communist vision through dissociation from everything that was considered tradition.

Today's spontaneous aversion to religion in CEE is partly similar to the religiophobia in Western societies. People spontaneously react negatively to the emergence of the presence and influence of religion in the public sphere; however, along with the historical roots of religiophobia in CEE, there is also a combination of the communist anti-religious sentiment with the import of the West's liberal anti-religious sensitivity led by the interest to save the freedom and autonomy of the liberal democratic system.

The political interpretations of the spontaneous aversion to religion in the East and the West may have their own insights and rights, but they focus only on the public dimension of religiophobia. For a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, it seems necessary to take a closer look into the private psychological logic and dynamic of religiophobia. In psychology, a phobic attitude is defined as "a behavior pattern apparently characterized by disruptions in the awareness of and attention to experience in the present. An example is engaging in a fantasy of the future to escape a painful present reality."[24] An aversion, however, is "a physiological or emotional response indicating dislike for a stimulus. It is usually accompanied by withdrawal from or avoidance of the objectionable stimulus."[25]

In addition to the psychological interpretation of phobia, it is also worth considering the socio-psychological aspects of understanding the minority-majority relationship.[26]

One of the reasons for this is that a marginalized existence, especially one in the role of the victim against the oppressor, is integrated into the collective identity of the group members.[27] Moreover, for generations, the group's victim narrative can become a relevant explanatory force in cases of group formations based on religion or worldviews. An example of this is the large-scale research (by Cairns, Mallet, Lewis, and Wilson[28]) done on inter-group conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. In this inter-

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[24] Defined by German-born U.S. psychiatrist Frederick (Fritz) S. Perls (1893-1970). American Psychological Association, "Phoebic Attitude," in *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, https://dictionary.apa.org/phoebic_attitude (accessed November 3, 2020).

[25] American Psychological Association, "Aversion," in *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, https:// dictionary.apa.org/aversion (accessed November 3, 2020).

[26] See Daniel Bar-Tal and Dikla Antebi, "Siege Mentality in Israel," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 16, no. 3 (1992): 251-275 and Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[27] János László, *Történelem történetek: Bevezetés a narratív szociálpszichológiába* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2012) and Éva Fülöp and Kővágó Pál, eds., *A kollektív áldozati szerep szociálpszichológiája* (Budapest: Oriold, 2018).

[28] Ed Cairns, John Mallet, Christopher A. Lewis, and Ronnie Wilson, "Who are the Victims? Self-assessed Victimhood and the Northern Irish Conflict," in *NIO Research and Statistical Series, Report No. 7* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2003).

pretation, spontaneous aversion to Christianity (especially concerning the role of the Catholic Church) may also become an interpretive framework for non-Catholic/non-Christian and atheist groups given the dominant position of the Catholic Church in European history or recent ecclesiastical/political regional entanglements and the identity constructs connected to them.[29]

In the dynamics of the victim, the spontaneous reaction to the perpetrator's dominant position may be associated with the actual or perceived arrogance assigned to the out-group and the threat experienced by the in-group. It may create specific implicit emotional patterns that may also be worthy of further investigations of spontaneous religious aversion.

In our research, we focus on a unique aspect of atheism: spontaneous aversion to religion. Along with Bubík et al., we also believe that there is a need:

> […] to reevaluate methods used to study the phenomenon of noreligion in this region. The majority of studies […] base their understanding of the phenomenon mostly on various forms of historical methods or combine them with discourse analysis of text […]. [S]uch methodology, however, is capable of adequately addressing only certain types of atheists and noreligion: for example, the aforementioned analytical atheism or institutionalized forms of secularity.[30]

The novelty of our approach lies in our research methodology. A methodological approach is still under development through which we believe we might deepen our understanding of spontaneous aversion to religion and, more broadly, atheism in CEE. Although we have a wealth of data on CEE atheism, we could explore several new aspects using qualitative social scientific methods. Our research intends to involve the practice of photo-elicitation, which is rarely used in religious studies or the anthropology of religion. With the help of the photo-elicitation method, we will be able to concentrate on spontaneous aversion to religion by using images evoking feelings regarding respective dimensions of religion. Since this method grasps the level of emotions, the reflected analytical knowledge is pushed into the background. Reflective listening – a unique interviewing technique – will be utilized in order to shed light on the emotional domains of aversion to religion. In reflective listening conversations, one does not seek to gain a certain kind of knowledge or information from the informants but, rather, inspires them to share experiences, feelings, and emotions through the so-called mirroring method. This method is a unique method of interviewing. Furthermore, to prove and underline the plausibility of our qualitative research data, we intend to carry out cognitive, laboratory-based experiments,

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[29] Réka Szilárdi, *Az újpogány vallási diskurzus narratív mintázatai* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2017).

[30] Bubík et al., eds., *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe.*

along with the Affect Misattribution Procedure,[31] all of which are the most promising methods in measuring prejudice. Pilot studies must be designed and implemented to see whether these methods can bring us closer to understanding spontaneous aversion to religion.

This paper intended to introduce the concept of spontaneous aversion to religion and highlight the need for new methodological approaches leading to a deeper understanding of atheism in CEE. The elaboration and further analysis of spontaneous aversion to religion might lead to learning more about those who reject religion and thus increase the chances of social co-existence and peaceful communication in a pluralistic society.

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[31] Keith Payne and Kristjen Lundberg, "The Affect Misattribution Procedure: Ten Years of Evidence on Reliability, Validity, and Mechanisms," *Social and Personality. Psychology Compass* 8, no. 12 (2014): 672-686.

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Varieties of Religiosity in V4 Societies

Jan Jandourek, Bernadett Balassa, and András Máté-Tóth

There are several reasons for trying to compare the four countries of the so-called V4 societies (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia). It is not just that they are neighboring countries that were part of one state formation a century ago and feel a certain closeness to each other – despite various tensions. They also provide an interesting and contrasting picture of the great differences regarding the presence/absence of religion (spirituality) in their territory at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

It is precisely the large differences we see in a relatively small geographical area that alerts us to the fact that when considering the religious profile of a given country, we must take into account not only the global context (better said, the European-American and, specifically, European contexts), but also local factors. The latter may influence the global factors to a certain extent, and with a certain delay. No matter how much the limited validity of the secularization thesis is emphasized nowadays, we can see that it is largely valid with regard to a large part of Europe, at least as far as the external manifestations of the traditional major religions are concerned.

Data View

Virtually all the data collected in the European Values Study (2017) show the long-known and almost trivial fact that Poland and Slovakia maintain higher levels of religiosity and attachment to their denominational structures when compared with the other two V4 societies (Czech Republic and Hungary).

Question: **"Do you belong to a religious denomination?"**

(in percentages):	YES	NO
Czech Republic	26.4	72.6
Hungary	46.2	52.4
Poland	91.2	7.8
Slovakia	74.9	24.4

Question: "Do you believe in God?"

(in percentages):	YES	NO
Czech Republic	31.4	49.9
Hungary	65.2	26.6
Poland	90	6.7
Slovakia	71.4	21.2

As we will see below, answers to the question of how they imagine God differ among the four countries. For example, only 6.5 percent of Czechs believe in a personal God, while 31.4 percent of the respondents simply say they believe in God.

Question: "How often do you pray?"

(in percentages):	EVERY DAY	NEVER
Czech Republic	10.5	62.7
Hungary	18.1	33.9
Poland	44.1	10.4
Slovakia	27.4	23.9

These data do not allow us to know whether respondents do not imagine prayer as merely a formal activity, such as the use of a pre-given liturgical or other text. Perhaps they engage in some actions that could be included in the concept of prayer in a broader sense, for example, some form of meditation. The definition from Britannica.com shows how broad the concept of prayer can be:

> Prayer, an act of communication by humans with the sacred or holy-God, the gods, the transcendent realm, or supernatural powers. Found in all religions at all times, prayer may be a corporate or personal act utilizing various forms and techniques. Prayer has been described in its sublimity as 'an intimate friendship, a frequent conversation held alone with the Beloved' by St. Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century Spanish mystic.[1]

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, of course, gives a narrower definition:

> Prayer is spiritual communication between man and God, a two-way relationship in which man should not only talk to God but also listen to Him. Prayer to God is like a child's conversation with his father. It is natural for a child to ask his father for the things he needs.[2]

Czechia – The Leader in Secularization

The Czech Republic clearly leads in the departure from official religious structures and dogmatically established contents of the faith. At the same

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[1] Britannica, "Prayer," https://www.britannica.com/topic/prayer (accessed March 13, 2023).

[2] Billy Graham, "What is prayer?," https://billygraham.org/answer/what-is-prayer/ (accessed March 13, 2023).

time, it is obvious how different the two parts of former Czechoslovakia are in this respect.

As a *pars pro toto* example, we can look at the specifics of the Czech Republic, which can serve as a basis for comparison with other V4 societies.

Regarding the form and fate of various church structures and the influence of church institutions on the life of society and individuals, the Czech Republic, in particular, is one of the most secularized places on the European continent. The reason is because more distant historical events led to a certain split in the national consciousness, which refers to the period of the Hussite wars in the fifteenth century, the forced re-Catholization in the sixteenth century, and the occupation of High Church positions by people of German nationality during the existence of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (while the so-called lower clergy was Czech). This problem of the contradiction between loyalty to the nation and a church is unknown to believers in Poland or Slovakia. The Bohemian lands within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy belonged to those areas that underwent industrialization relatively early and the associated population movements from rural to urban areas and changes in the social structure.

All these factors, social and psychological, then acted simultaneously. The last significant intervention was the removal of approximately three million Sudeten Germans from the Czechoslovak borderlands after the Second World War. This caused further disruption of traditional social ties, as people with no connection to a specific place came to the emptied part and, if they had formally belonged to a church in their original community, they lost this awareness when they moved to a new place.

After the communist takeover in 1948, the communist regime succeeded in destroying several organizational church structures, which affected especially the Catholic Church, whose style of pastoral care relied heavily on religious orders, schools, associations, and the press. Communist propaganda sought to erase the presence of religion from the consciousness of society. The loss of the possibility to act through the press, books, and radio meant that Christians became invisible.

The severely limited and practically non-existent possibility to travel to Western countries also made contact and exchange with the new and Christian thinking that had to deal with the problem of secularization after the Second World War very difficult.

It is obvious that the period of the communist dictatorship with its atheistic ideology was very destructive for the Czech Church and that this experience could not but have had an impact on its situation in the democratic society after the fall of communism [...]. To understand the subsequent development, however, it is necessary not to obscure the fact that in the Church there were not only

victims and martyrs, but also people prepared to compromise with the new power and even collaborators with the communist regime.[3]

After the end of the communist regime in 1989, the potential created by believers in non-public church structures was not even used. The communist regime succeeded in entrenching in the people the awareness that Christianity was a matter of pre-scientific or anti-scientific thinking and that, in the Czech environment in particular, religion was part of anti-national oppression. Although the official proclamation of this propaganda has ended, these ideas have automatically been passed on to the next generation.

The Shift of Secularization over Time

Other data shows us a phenomenon that we could call a shift of secularization over time.

Question: "Did you (previously) belong to a religious denomination?"

(in percentages – valid percent):	YES	NO
Czech Republic	11.2	88.8
Hungary	13.7	86.3
Poland	67	33
Slovakia	14	86

Here it is evident that Poland's rate of non-members is several times higher than those who were once members but are no longer. We can probably interpret this to mean that in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, due to circumstances in those countries, those who wanted to leave have already left. Likewise, those who have not yet succumbed to secularization pressure are probably more immune to it. The rate of erosion of affiliation is higher in traditional religious societies. However, one would have to examine more closely what the statement "they were formerly members" means. Was it merely formal membership, i.e., they were entered in some church registers? Or were they at least involved, to some extent, in the practice of their religious beliefs?

Other surveys also show that the process of secularization is continuing in Poland and Slovakia. For example, in Poland, a study by the Centre for Social Prevention says that young people's attitudes towards churches and religion are determined more by current events, especially those shrouded in scandal, than by deeply religious matters.[4] This research was carried out by a research team led by sociologists Mariusz Jędrzejko (also a teacher) and

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[3] Petr Fiala, *Laboratoř sekularizace. Náboženství a politika v ne-náboženské společnosti: český případ* (Brno: CDK, 2007), 39; translation by the author.

[4] "Sonda: Co modzi Polacy sdz o Kociele?" [Young People Running Away from Church], *Warsaw: Rzeczpospolita Daily*, March 17, 2021, http://www.pl/kosciol/art 224801-sondaz-co-mlodzi-polacy-sadza-o-kosciele (accessed March 13, 2023).

Tomasz Kozłowski. According to the study, 1,051 teenagers aged 14 to 18 from all over the country were interviewed about religious issues and social problems, including pathologies in the Catholic Church. It turns out that more than 62% of young people consider themselves religious, but a third do not. At the same time, 59% of them say their religiosity has weakened in the past two years. One in five respondents admitted they had stopped going to Sunday Mass, and it was not because of the pandemic.

Up to 64.8% of young people see the reasons for the change in their religiosity in the inconsistency between what religion says and what the Church does. Slightly fewer, 63%, say that the Church does not respond adequately to pedophilia in its ranks. 43.2% are bothered by the Church's involvement in politics and 41.2% by the ostentation and unjustified wealth of Church representatives. 38.9% say that the Church does not understand the needs of young people and 34.7% say that the Church does not understand the modern world. 31.4%, or almost one in three respondents, also state the Church's inappropriate attitude towards civil partnerships and abortion as a reason for their change in religiosity, and 28.9% say the reason is due to the Church's lack of involvement in the affairs of ordinary people.

The young people also defined their future relationship with the Church. More than half of them, 51.1%, emphasize that they want to bring up their children in the faith in which they were brought up. However, 13.9% of respondents say that their future relationship with the Church would be more formal, but that they would hold traditional celebrations. 28.8%, almost one in three respondents, intend to give up participation in religious life.

Up to 72.8% of respondents do not trust the Polish hierarchy to reform the Church and regain its authority. They trust Pope Francis – 71% believe he wants to reform the Church and eliminate pathologies. For half of those surveyed, Francis is a moral authority.[5]

Worship Attendance

For data on worship attendance rates, we can select data that may indicate how large the hard core religious communities are.

Question: "How often do you attend religious services?"

(in percentages):	MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK	ONCE A WEEK
Czech Republic	1.4	5.2
Hungary	1.8	9.1
Poland	6.4	42.6
Slovakia	7.3	23.7

[5] Onet Wiadomosci, "Sondaż: młodzi ludzie w Polsce mniej religijni i bardziej krytyczni wobec Kościoła," https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/sondaz-religijnosc-wsrod-mlodych-i-stosunek-do-kosciola/7b70jn6 (accessed March 13, 2023).

As we know from other sources, Roman Catholics are the largest religious group in all these V4 societies. Since the Catholic Church requires its members to attend Sunday services at least once a week, participation/nonparticipation can be considered with high probability as a measure of loyalty to the Church's authority. (There is also a secular analogy where a weekly rhythm is required for an action to be effective: work meetings, publication of periodicals, attendance at psychotherapy, scout meetings, etc.)

According to a survey of worshippers conducted by the Czech Bishops' Conference in October 2019, 375 000 people attend church at least once a week in the Czech Republic, which is 8.2% of the Catholic baptized in the Czech Republic. Almost one-fifth of the attendees are young people under the age of 20. The result of the poll, which is organized by the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic once every 5 years, corresponds to opinion polls, according to which 5% of respondents indicate that they go to church regularly once a week.

Religious and Nonreligious Persons

The mere affiliation to a religious denomination that respondents declare is a matter of form. Following the principle that faith is known by deeds, we can look at what respondents say they practice and what they think.

Question: "Are you a religious person?"
(respondents answered by selecting one of three options)

(in percentages):	YES	NONRELIGIOUS	I AM A CONVINCED ATHEIST
Czech Republic	34.2	44.9	12
Hungary	53.9	36.1	6.9
Poland	83.5	9.7	3.3
Slovakia	73.6	17.9	4.7

These answers are among the most interesting findings because they confirm that there are very few convinced atheists. Self-identification as a nonreligious person then means something different from atheism. We can assume that nonreligious persons have their own conception of spirituality but do not accept the pronouncements of official religious authorities.

But the concept is complicated and highly vague. According to Merriam-Webster.com, synonyms for nonreligious are "churchless, unchurched, heathen, pagan, paganish, ungodly, unholy, blasphemous, impious, irreverent, profane, sacrilegious, agnostic, atheistic, unconsecrated, unhallowed, profane, secular, temporal, worldly."[6] Without qualitative research, we will not know where to place an individual respondent.

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[6] Webster Dictionary, "Nonreligious," https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/nonreligious (accessed March 13, 2023).

Ideas about God

The previous question about whether someone is religious/nonreligious/convinced atheist is probably related to the concept of God. A high percentage of people in the Czech Republic do not believe in a personal God, as would be consistent with the Christian tradition, but imagine God in some other way.

Question: "Which statement is closest to your beliefs?"
(in percentages):

which statement closest to your beliefs (Q20)

country code (ISO 3166-1 Alpha-2 code)			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Czechia	Valid	personal God	117	6,5	7,1	7,1
		spirit or life force	672	37,1	40,5	47,6
		don't know what to think	403	22,3	24,3	71,9
		no spirit, God or life force	467	25,8	28,1	100
		Total	1659	91,6	100	
	Missing	no answer	54	3		
		dont know	98	5,4		
		Total	152	8,4		
	Total		1811	100		
Hungary	Valid	personal God	497	32,8	33,8	33,8
		spirit or life force	454	30	30,8	64,6
		don't know what to think	255	16,8	17,3	81,9
		no spirit, God or life force	266	17,6	18,1	100
		Total	1472	97,2	100	
	Missing	no answer	25	1,7		
		dont know	17	1,1		
		Total	42	2,8		
	Total		1514	100		
	Missing	no answer	25	1,7		
		dont know	17	1,1		
		Total	42	2,8		
	Total		1514	100		
Poland	Valid	personal God	845	62,5	65	65
		spirit or life force	232	17,2	17,8	82,8
		don't know what to think	154	11,4	11,8	94,7
		no spirit, God or life force	69	5,1	5,3	100
		Total	1300	96,2	100	
	Missing	no answer	10	0,7		
		dont know	42	3,1		
		Total	52	3,8		
	Total		1352	100		
Slovakia	Valid	personal God	524	36,6	38,4	38,4
		spirit or life force	487	34	35,7	74,1
		don't know what to think	186	13	13,6	87,7
		no spirit, God or life force	168	11,7	12,3	100
		Total	1365	95,3	100	
	Missing	no answer	40	2,8		
		dont know	27	1,9		
		Total	67	4,7		
	Total		1432	100		

Several questions should be asked here. For example, why is it that 12% of the respondents from the Czech Republic are convinced atheists, while 25.8% claim that there is no God as a spirit or life force. We see a similar contradiction in Hungary.

At the same time, it is obvious that a high percentage of people, even in secularized societies, have an idea of a God, but do not want to give God any dogmatic attributes. We cannot expect nonreligious persons to be clear about

the notion of person or personal when even theologians themselves have complex debates about it, for example, with regard to the trinity.

> Influential 20th-century theologians Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Karl Rahner (1904-84) endorse one-self Trinity theories, and suggest replacements for the term 'Person.' They argue that in modern times 'person' has come to mean a self. But three divine selves would be three gods. Hence, even if 'Person' should be retained as traditional, its meaning in the context of the Trinity should be expounded using phrases like 'modes of being' (Barth) or 'manners of subsisting' (Rahner).[7]

Eschatological Questions

- 29.9% of Czechs, 40.2% of Hungarians, 64.4% of Poles, and 51% of Slovaks believe in life after death.
- 22.5% of Czechs, 38% of Hungarians, 63.5% of Poles, and 48.4% of Slovaks believe in the existence of heaven.
- The existence of hell is believed by 16.2% of Czechs, 25.7 % of Hungarians, 53.2% of Poles, and 41.3% of Slovaks.
- 22% of Czechs, 27.7% of Hungarians, 20% of Poles, and 18.8% of Slovaks believe in reincarnation.

Even in the case of beliefs about what happens after death, further questions would need to be asked for respondents to explain any discrepancies in their statements. In Poland, for example, 87.58% of the population claimed to be Catholic in the 2011 census. 7.1% did not answer. Nonbelievers accounted for 2.4%, other faiths and religions 1.3%. However, according to the EVS 2017, only 63.5% of Poles believe in heaven, 22.9% do not, and 12.6% do not know. Therefore, there is a large number of Catholics who do not believe in heaven or are not sure. In the case of hell, the discrepancy is even greater. 53.2% of Poles believe in it, 32.8% do not, and 7.2% do not know. The same applies to belief in reincarnation, where the sum of "believe in" and "don't know" is 34.6%. In terms of the other three V4 societies, the discrepancy is not so noticeable, but this is probably because they do not have such a large formal Catholic majority.[8] However, this kind of discrepancy in beliefs is not a new phenomenon, and it is also appearing elsewhere.

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[7] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Trinity," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/ (accessed March 13, 2023).

[8] Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych, *Ludność. Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna* (Warszawa: Główny Urzad Statystyczny, 2013), https://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/LUD_ludnosc_ stan_str_dem_spo_NSP2011.pdf.

Though the U.S. is an overwhelmingly Christian country, significant minorities profess belief in a variety of Eastern or New Age beliefs. For instance, 24% of the public overall and 22% of Christians say they believe in reincarnation – that people will be reborn in this world again and again. And similar numbers (25% of the public overall, 23% of Christians) believe in astrology. Nearly three-in-ten Americans say they have felt in touch with someone who has already died, almost one in five say they have seen or been in the presence of ghosts, and 15% have consulted a fortuneteller or a psychic.[9]

Or from another survey:

In a Christian context, it is reasonable to assume that belief in heaven and in life after death would be found together. However, a Gallup poll concluded in 1968 fully 15 percent of a random sample of Americans aged 21 and above expressed belief in heaven but not in the afterlife. This finding underscores the fact that beliefs are subtle and complex and cannot be fully understood from the simplistic yea-nay data gathered in most surveys of belief. Gliock and Sark's (1965) new denominationalism, with its focus on the degree of conviction, is a step in the right direction. Better yet is Berger's (1974)[10] recommendation that sociologists of religion break free from the time-honored taboo against an investigation into the supernatural per se. While social scientists cannot throw a spotlight on the gods, they can, and should, inquire into the details of what it is that individuals believe and do not believe […].

Bellah (1970)[11] argues that what is inconsistent for the researcher need not be inconsistent for believers, for whom logical consistency is not a relevant test of the validity of beliefs. The logic of particular believers might be different from the logic employed by social scientists. This position gains support from a large body of empirical studies conducted on a variety of beliefs, in a variety of settings, and over a fairly long period. Piker (1972)[12] found that Thai Buddhist monks perceived no conflict between their doctrine of karma (good works) and their wearing of good-luck amulets. He

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[9] Pew Research Center, "Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths," https://www.pewforum.org/2009/12/09/many-americans-mix-multiple-faiths/ (accessed March 13, 2023).

[10] Peter L. Berger, "Some Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13 (June 1974): 125-133.

[11] Robert N. Bellah, "Christianity and Symbolic Realism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 9 (Summer 1970): 89-96.

[12] Steven Piker, "The Problem of Consistency in Thai Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 11, no. 3 (1972): 211-229.

also found that the monks were unaware of many Buddhist doctrines. Thus, differences between traditional teachings and actual behavior might pose no conflict for these modern-day practitioners […].

These findings and theoretical perspectives challenge the very idea of inconsistent beliefs by raising the question: "Inconsistent in what sense?" We are unable to answer this important question satisfactorily with our limited data. However, we will seek answers to the preliminary question: "Who are the people who hold what appear to be inconsistent beliefs?"[13]

Summary

The V4 societies are a kind of interesting sociological laboratory. Two countries represent a strongly secularized form of society, and two still retain many traditional structures of religious communities with influence on society. While from a global perspective the secularization thesis does not seem to apply, things seem to be otherwise in the Czech Republic. Evangelical movements, Catholic fundamentalism, religions other than Christianity, and new religious movements do not play a significant role here. On the other hand, it is also evident that, in this country, religion is an anthropological constant, while taking on forms that are very vague and manifest themselves in various forms of alternative lifestyles, occultism, and the practice of pseudoscience. In any case, it would be useful to follow the developments in the V4 societies over time and to study the data provided by the EVS survey to further investigation through qualitative sociological methods. It seems necessary that such an investigation should be interdisciplinary, involving psychology, history, and religious studies.

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Leaving Religion Behind:
Varieties of Nonbelievers

Kinga Povedák, Jan Jandourek, and András Máté-Tóth

Introduction

The well-known anecdote of Gordon W. Allport can be taken as the starting point of our research and analysis of nonreligious individuals, or "nones," in the Czech Republic and Hungary.

> In Boston, a dignitary of the Roman Catholic Church was driving along a lonesome road on the outskirts of the city. Seeing a small Negro boy trudging along, the dignitary told his chauffeur to stop and give the boy a lift. Seated together in the back of the limousine, the cleric, to make conversation, asked, "Little Boy, are you a Catholic?" Wide-eyed with alarm, the boy replied, "No sir, it's bad enough being colored without being one of those things."[1]

There are two distinct categories revealed in this short dialogue. One is based on skin color, black or white, and the other is based on religion, Catholic or non-Catholic. Prejudices are societies' attempts to instill order in cultural and social relations and support societal orientations. Allport's anecdote demonstrates the most frequently used dichotomic categorization in these attempts: like the paradigm of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or,*[2] one can belong either to one particular category or to its antithetical other. There are no other alternatives. Dichotomic categorizations provide societies, institutions, and organizations with a kind of feeling of security and controlling capacity. Political parties and religious organizations use routine dichotomies to fulfill their political or religious aims and stabilize their followers' community. The importance and usefulness of dichotomic categorizations is higher in societies living in insecure circumstances and in times of deep transformations. Dichotomic categorizations simplify a plural and confused reality and encourage communities and private persons to make decisions and to act.

Reality and lived experiences always elicit a kind of contrast experience regarding dichotomic categories. Encountering people living in various circumstances and the logic of their thinking strongly relativizes any simplifications. Either/Or attempts do not work. A concrete person can only be categorized into simple categories by destroying their uniqueness and personality. Simple dichotomic classes are abstract, but a concrete person's vernacular

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[1] Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 4.

[2] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (London: Penguin UK, 2004).

reality is always also factual. Although it is not realistic to live in societies without any simple categories, it is unrealistic to know the society we live in without meeting and knowing persons in their uncategorized uniqueness. Our current research focuses on the varieties of religious orientations. We want to go beyond their simple dichotomic categories and try to relativize their inherited and routinized prejudices. Our main aim is to explore the latent dimensions behind the categories of "nones" and "nonbelievers."

The social science categories concerning religions and religiosities are multifaceted. They are elaborated based on scholarly efforts, approaches, and theories. All theoretical models have their genealogy and, more importantly, arise in the realm of unique and particular societal experiences and observations. In all of today's essential category systems regarding typology and classification of religiosity, it is easy to find the mutual interactions between the original adventures and observations and the attempts of understanding and interpretations. In the actual process of this interaction between data and interpretation, the theory that we now take for granted emerged. Some prestigious theorists of religion developed their theoretical concept and classification system quickly, while others dealt with their data and observations over a longer period of time. In our recent study, we try to work rather slowly with our theoretical reflections and classifications. We argue for meditative patience in "dwelling with the data" and in reserving time for discussions.

Our option for slowness is partly motivated by Milan Kundera's book *Slowness*.[3] He tried to describe life in Czech society with a particularly slow rhythm. This was not because real life under communist rule was slow at all. The total mobilization of society after the communist takeover was very rapid in Czechoslovakia and the entire Central and Eastern European region. The totalitarian power enforced with violence created a new society, a new person, and a new thinking, including new categories and classifications. Kundera's message is inspiring because he reminds us of society's and culture's ordinary and organic rhythm. Knowing and understanding people and communities in their relation to religion and culture seems crucial to saving time for more extended observation. Concerning direct religious categories, another important source for a cautious approach is Tomás Halík's book, *Patience with God*.[4] He argues in a theological way that God requires us to persevere with our doubts, carry them in our hearts, and allow them to lead us to maturity. In his view, using the simple dichotomy of believer versus non-believer or faithful versus atheist has a destructive effect.

The disciplinary history of studying religious opinions, psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology is almost a century long. As a result of this extended time of theoretical investigations, we now have many varieties of finely elaborated religious classifications. In contrast, increased scholarly interest with respect to the nones arose only about two decades ago. There-

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[3] Milan Kundera, *Slowness* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014).

[4] Tomáš Halík, *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

fore, we are still situated in the theory-generative turbulent period of mutual interaction between data and observations on the one hand, and theoretical approaches on the other.

Methodology

In this project, we embarked on conducting interviews with people who were disengaged from religions. The sample consisted of interviewees who had a nonreligious upbringing or a somewhat blurry but non-defining religious background and left religion behind.

Research into the nones is scarce in Central and Eastern Europe. Qualitative approaches to the nones in this region are even more difficult to find. Bubík, Remmel, and Václavík, the editors of the first comprehensive collection discussing freethought and atheism in Central and Eastern Europe, see four possible reasons for lack of research:

> First, scholarly interest after the re-establishment of the study of religion, understandably, has mostly dealt with filling the gap in the study of religious denominations […] and "forced secularization." […] Second, reinterpretations of national identity are often associated with religion, which renders the study of noreligion in a particular national context somewhat irrelevant or problematic. […] Third, […] studies of religion have been supported (and influenced in one way or another) by local churches. […] Finally, due to the close connections with Soviet ideology, "atheism," for many, still has negative connotations and is often understood within the framework of church-state relationships, persecution and criticism of religion and seen as the primary cause for the current rise of non-religiosity in post-Communist countries.[5]

In recent decades, records of previous surveys and censuses examining the indicators of religiosity show that a significant part of the population defined themselves as "religious in my own way," and another significant part defined themselves as "nonreligious." However, the results are repeatedly misleading. They mostly operate with generalizing categories characterized by a more indefinable "in my own way" or "not at all" attitude. We know, however, that the spirituality of the post-secular age is strongly characterized by the individual bricolage of religious practices, which extends beyond transcendence to the phenomena of the immanent world. Consequently, it is fair to assume that this individual diversity or *á la carte* character is true for the worldview of those who consider themselves nonreligious.

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[5] Tomáš Bubík, Atko Remmel, and David Václavík, eds., *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2020), 6-7.

From a methodological point of view, however, we run into difficulties. On the one hand, previous analyses in Central and Eastern Europe have not specifically examined the worldview of nonbelievers and their attitudes in detail and, on the other hand, that noreligion can only be revealed to a limited extent by quantitative data collection.

All individuals construct their identity and worldview from the available components of their own culture in an individual way; consequently, in principle, we should find as many different attitudes as individuals. Naturally, this is not the case. Individuals choose from a comprehensive set called "their own culture," so in "sorting" they often incorporate the same elements into their personal worldview and individual practices. As a result, we assume that the constructions from the given elements are organized into trends, which are determined by the significant moments of individual life events in addition to public culture, cultural memory, and attachments to certain institutions. Moreover, it is important to be aware that the category of "nones" has non-static characteristics, such as the components of "nonbelief," which may change in parallel with the development of personal life, cultural, and interpersonal experiences. Thus, within noreligion, even in the case of a single individual, shifts of emphasis may appear, that is, in the depth and intensity of nonbelief. Consequently, our task is to explore these personal attitudes and their driving forces among individuals who classify themselves in the overall category of the nones.

Through our qualitative approach, we compiled a semi-structured questionnaire and asked about the attitudes of the individuals who define themselves as nonbelievers. We were also interested in finding out what factors influenced their attitudes towards the image of religions and their perceptions of religions.

Many scholars have argued in earlier contributions for what we might refer to as the "nonreligious turn" – that there is an abundance of terms referring to the disengagement from religion. In accordance with them, we argue that noreligion and the nones are not a satisfying analytical category. Among others, Matthew Engelke refers to atheism, godlessness, and noreligion as troublesome words, especially if deployed in the hopes of having much analytic purchase.[6]

As expressed above, while the categories of affiliated, "religious in my own way," or nonreligious might suggest clear-cut and safe definitions, once we immerse ourselves in the analysis of the interviews with the nones, we discover the uncertainty of the multiplicity and ambiguity of lived religious and nonreligious experiences.

The current study is based on ten (10) Czech (marked as CZ) and ten (10) Hungarian (marked as HU) interviews. The semi-structured interviews followed the preset research question of understanding the worldviews,

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[6] Matthew Engelke, "On Atheism and Non-Religion: An Afterword," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 59, no. 2 (2015): 135.

spiritual practices, and lifeworlds of nonreligious individuals (referred to as nones). The interviews were conducted based on a previously discussed set of questions in order to make comparisons possible between the Czech and Hungarian data.

The Landscape of Religious Unaffiliation or "Nones"

The psychologist William James wrote:

> Some persons, for instance, never are, and possibly never under any circumstances could be, converted. Religious ideas cannot become the center of their spiritual energy. They may be excellent persons, servants of God in practical ways, but they are not children of his kingdom. They are either incapable of imagining the invisible; or else, in the language of devotion, they are life-long subjects of "barrenness" and "dryness." Such inaptitude for religious faith may in some cases be intellectual in its origin. Their religious faculties may be checked in their natural tendency to expand, by beliefs about the world that are inhibitive, the pessimistic and materialistic beliefs, for example, within which so many good souls, who in former times would have freely indulged their religious propensities, find themselves nowadays, as it were, frozen; or the agnostic vetoes upon faith as something weak and shameful, under which so many of us today lie cowering, afraid to use our instincts. In many persons such inhibitions are never overcome. To the end of their days they refuse to believe, their personal energy never gets to its religious center, and the latter remains inactive in perpetuity.[7]

Perhaps today, a century after William James, we could add that some people do not reject spiritual and religious ideas but are unable to accept only one faith as binding and true. They are unable to do so intellectually and emotionally. It would be interesting to examine further the degree of certainty given to them by the beliefs they have created for themselves. Do some people have an "innate" inability to be orthodox, that is, to find security in a well-defined and relatively closed system? Doesn't the offer of a strictly defined system raise doubts?

In the first part of this paper, as a way of blurring the dichotomy between the religious and the nonreligious, we used our comparative data to explore further categories within the nones. Through the analysis of our empirical material, we were interested in the trends and main features of individual religiosity history. Nonbelievers or nones is a large and vague category that

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[7] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018), 204-205.

can be quite difficult to characterize as a whole. Based on the conducted interviews, we were able to develop basic categories and open up the multiple varieties or subgroups of nones. Looking at the recurring patterns and degree of losing religious practices or leaving religion behind, at least four distinct categories within the nones could be developed. The nuances and differences between these categories are illustrated through some representative interview excerpts. We have not yet conducted enough interviews to complete and finalize this categorization, and we believe there are more categories. We would like to point to the problem that the nones are a highly colorful group and, as a result, it is analytically difficult to categorize them into one group as there are huge differences within the group. In conclusion, the colorful and multiple characteristics of the nones can be best grasped through empirical/ ethnographic analysis.[8]

a) In the first category, we identify individuals who slowly and gradually leave institutional religious practices behind but still have a connection to churches through life-cycle ceremonies, rituals, and liturgies (baptisms, weddings, funerals). These experiences are not necessarily positive; however, we did not encounter any explicit anti-religious or anti-clerical comments in interviews of individuals who were grouped in this category. The significance of social expectation should be highlighted at this point. Several individuals expressed that there is a need to satisfy the expectations of elder family members by participating in life-cycle ceremonies.

HU01
No matter what I believe and what I think, there is a social expectation, and the family has an expectation as well, so this has an effect on us. We will have our wedding next year and we will also have a Roman Catholic wedding. I'm also a little afraid of that because I didn't practice my religion, which is an important aspect.

b) The next category can also be characterized by those who are gradually leaving institutional practices behind; however, new practices emerge through irregular religious or spiritual impulses with other religions.

HU03
My mother was a party member, so I didn't really go to church; my grandmother was the one who took me to church from time to time or showed me some kind of religious rituals, so I got to know the religion through her. In the parental home, for that reason, religion as such was not a topic at all. […] I loved going to church with my granny because it was so intimate, so magi-

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[8] Naturally, all the interviews are anonymous in order to protect the identity of the interviewees. The source of the material is coded with CZ for the Czech Republic and HU for Hungary.

cal, but I was no longer interested in faith matters. I did not go to catechism classes either, I was only baptized, that's all. […]

- What influenced your worldview later in life?

It was not something, but somebody. There was a person who led me towards spirituality. It's a very interesting mix of myself, religion and spiritualism and […] everything. Yes, my friend was the one who was very spiritual, I was involved in many of these more spiritual things. […] My faith system is something that I have created. This is very special. I believe there is something that moves us from above.

CZ04
I'm a classical Christian from South Moravia. I was forced into Christianity. When they make you go to church, that's the standard in South Moravia, so the form of religion is created by parents, or society, you have to deal with it. You see the form of that compulsion to go to church. At the same time, your internal questions are more personal. When your parents, actually your mother, make you go to church because she goes there, you go there so your mother won't be unhappy. Then you get an aversion to that religion. That's where you meet only those people who have only some form, like the artificial authority, like the vicar. He tells you something, but he doesn't care about you psychologically. You go to confession, he hears you, but he doesn't know the context, he doesn't know what's going on. It's just a form or a dogma.

c) Individuals representative of the third group have completely turned away from religion and left it behind for good. However, this turn away did not couple with feelings of aversion against churches or anti-clericalism in the interviews.

CZ10
I grew up in a Catholic bubble, only my dad was an evangelical Christian. I've been involved in various activities of the unofficial church since I was 12 years old […]. I thought a lot about my faith at the age of about 30. I guess that's when I grew up. Gradually, I discovered that I didn't really have many arguments for my belief in the existence of God. These years of pondering ended with the realization that I had no relevant argument for the existence of God, and I became a complete atheist […]. My conversion to atheism took away rather than brought anything. It took from me the meaning of life, the hope of life in fullness, life eternal in God […]. It brought a certain sense of honesty. It freed me from the need (duty?) to spend a certain amount of time praying every day.

d) In this category, individuals grew up without a religious upbringing and, later in life, realized the need for certain religious/spiritual guiding principles. Through their life course they seemed to be open to religious ideas

and, later in their life, they evolved spiritually and embraced certain religious/ spiritual forms.

Even in a country with an official atheist ideology, and in a family where there are already weak or no religious traditions, it seems that eventually the seekers will find some of what survives in his/her country, either in the form of the once prevailing religion, or in some new spiritual currents. Only in some cases will there be a definite and permanent conversion. Even after conversion to the prevailing religion, after a while, other spiritual orientations may be influential. The result may be a personal syncretic religion where one influence prevails.

CZ1

I wouldn't say I'm religious, nor would I say I'm an atheist. If I'd gotten more familiar with it, I might as well have a religion. But other than that, I'm of the opinion that religion, whether Buddhism or Christianity or whatever, can certainly make sense. I think it's more about nurture if you grow up in it. I didn't grow up in anything like that, nor have I yet decided to resort to anything like that or care about it anymore. So I can't say I'm against the taste, but that's the way it is. I just don't have it yet, maybe I will someday. Maybe I see it a little bit as a crutch.

CZ2

I evolved more in opposition to those values that were in the family. With parents who were more atheist, grounded in the everyday. I was actually influenced by a teacher who turned out to be a secret nun. We had her for math, we weren't really supposed to get into any subversive stuff under communism. But somehow it happened. That's when I realized gradually that she had influenced me in some way. Then there were friends growing up in some crises. They brought me ideas that led me to Christianity. I went from that to Zen in some way. Then into a mad sect, and out of it into some greater freedom. They were individual characters who appeared, perhaps for a brief moment in their lives.

CZ3

I had a classic feud between my mother and mother-in-law, and my grandmother. Grandma was officially Orthodox, but she's more of a seer, a healer, an interpreter of cards […] she believes in all sorts of things, she believes in aliens, and she's a much-practiced de facto healer. My mom was originally an atheist, raised in a Russian environment, who, after moving here because of her interest in homeopathy, traditional medicine and meeting various Russian people here, converted to Orthodox Christianity and gradually became more and more orthodox. My grandmother's dad was first a hedonist and a man who read a lot of science fiction books and philosophy. It shaped my view of the world a lot in terms of humor and human approach to all religions. And finally, I have a brother who's an Orthodox priest in Russia and who we can argue with in different ways on the Internet. I would just say

I'm religious in my own way. From heresy to pantheism to some kind of, as they called it in school, new age convenience store where you pick what you like. So I see things there that I don't like a lot, that I believe in, but as a result I'm close to Taoist teachings, philosophy, to pantheism, to neo-paganism. I'm not close to a church.

- How has your view of religion changed over time?

CZ9
From atheism to theism without a specific religion.

- Are there specific events or specific time periods when you recall a change or shift in your religious or nonreligious view of the world?

CZ9
A few years after the outbreak of bipolar disorder, a strong inclination toward Christianity. I was with the Jesuits at St. Ignatius, they recommended reading the Bible and contemplation. After a while, I realized it wasn't my way. (That was 16 years ago.) It changed again a year ago. It had to do with a minor attack of my disease, but it was based on it regardless of the disease, it just hastened it. It continues to this day. It's a gradual process, probably associated with maturation/aging, observing life around and within. I was intrigued by the texts of Eckart Tolle (close conception of E. Tomáš, a modern Czech yoga teacher and spiritual leader, inter alia connecting and interpreting different religions and picking up their common points). […] I believe that the life that animates my body will continue in some other form, something else will emerge from atoms and molecules, but, yes, it will carry the same "consciousness."

e) There is another category which we can call "diffused" based on Cipriani's term "diffused religion."[9] People stand in a parallel way on the outside of the traditional religious organization and, at the same time, on the inside of this organization. They are, for the most part, no longer religious but are atheist, despite their deep socio-religious interconnectedness.

- Do you connect with others who share your beliefs and view of the world?

CZ10
(from Catholicism to atheism)
This is one problem with my deconversion. I know two people with similar fates. The religious people don't understand what my problem is, for the nonbelievers it's all completely Dada. I am very much alone in this

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[9] Roberto Cipriani, *Diffused Religion: Beyond Secularization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

fundamental view of the world. I sometimes discuss this with the two friends mentioned earlier.

- Where do you normally associate with others with a similar worldview or belief?

This is another slightly sad aspect of my deconversion. Most friends are religious, I feel at home here. I've tried going to various skeptical/atheist societies, but I've never felt very comfortable there. My heart was still Catholic. I try to support groups actively promoting science and critical thinking. And at the same time, I go to church sometimes, I support my parish. Because here are my roots, here are the people I love.

Remnants of Religious Worldviews or Practices as a Coping Mechanism

In this chapter, we would like to highlight the most characteristic dimensions of the spiritual lives of the religiously unaffiliated. Although the nones turn away from forms of institutional religiosity, certain spiritual mechanisms or resources necessary for them to "cope with life" remain. One of the most important of these spiritual resources is prayer, understood as a universal magical praxis. As articulated by Drescher, prayer has historically been maintained and identified by religious institutions.[10] However, in her book, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of the American Nones,* we learn that many American nones see prayer as an important part of their spiritual lives, with some of them praying quite regularly.

> Prayer for Nones is often a spiritual technology of empathetic imagination, that is, drawing the person who prays into more deeply felt relationship with others, both human and nonhuman, natural and, less frequently among those who spoke with me, supernatural.[11]

Further important mechanisms include the ways in which spiritual practices are used in order to cope with death and grief and the search for meaning and beliefs in the afterlife. All these coping mechanisms are understood as plausibility structures, a pragmatic way of making sense of and navigating through life.

The persistence of prayer or ritual in people who are moving away from their original religious background is not surprising. We also find the need

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[10] Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 158.

[11] Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 171.

for ritual and prayer among atheists. As William Irwin, professor of philosophy at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, writes:

> Legend has it that the physicist Niels Bohr had a horseshoe hanging above his door. A colleague asked him why, to which he responded, "it's for luck." The colleague then asked him if he believed in luck. Bohr reassured him that as a scientist he did not believe in luck. Puzzled, the colleague asked again why Bohr had the horseshoe hanging above his door. Bohr responded, "I'm told that you don't have to believe in order for it to work." […] It is possible to be a praying atheist, a "pray-theist" if you like. In fact, Tibetan Buddhism offers a prayer for the "four immeasurables" – loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity – that some atheists may find appealing […][12]

> a) Prayer as magic praxis.

- Either in a religious or everyday sense, do you think prayer works?

HU01
It's called differently in many religions, but you find it pretty much everywhere. Prayer, mantra […] or just it is also in self-help books that you say that I want to achieve this and that – it is similar to the law of attraction. So it is there, and it works, because obviously, if you focus on something and control your energies that way, it will obviously work. Now we can call that prayer, but it still works.

HU10
There are many kinds of prayers, depending on religions. That if we break down what prayer means, what prayer really means […] when we pray, in my opinion, we focus our attention on a particular line of thought. And I think that kind of focus is key, a prayer can be equated with meditation, for example.

- Do you think that prayers work?

HU05
I have mixed feelings. There were times when it worked. I didn't pray in the usual, proper way. But obviously, I also had moments when I begged for something […] not to God, but to the universe, the world, to make it better or make something better to happen. It has worked many times, there have been

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[12] William Irwin, "Prayer for Atheists: Prayer helps even if you don't believe in God," *iai news*, December 10, 2018, https://iai.tv/articles/prayer-for-atheists-auid-1181 (accessed November 8, 2022).

times when I have asked unnecessarily. I think prayer can work, but I haven't figured out why or what conditions are necessary.

CZ6

(A convert from atheism to Catholicism at age 18, alternately practicing, influenced by Buddhism, believes in reincarnation. Now, after a complex mental crisis lasting three years, he is returning to normal life.)

The thing about Catholicism is […] I always have these periods where I go to confess and then go to the sacraments and then maybe nothing for a long time because I feel like I'm not really living up to the Ten Commandments. So I'm going to let it go and pray my little prayers again and hope God understands. Then I have a period of coming back and not missing Mass. When I was in the asylum, there was supposed to be a Mass, but because of the Covid-19 virus, there wasn't. So I was doing my little Sunday moment […]. But other than that, I take communion, it's really strong. I'm absolutely thrilled.

CZ1

I've always seen prayer a little bit as if you're nurturing yourself, that actually, when you're praying, you're performing a ritual, and the more accurately and more often you perform that ritual, the more certain you are of why you want to perform it, just like when you love a person and the more energy you devote, the more you love, the more the relationship gives you, so I see it that way.

CZ1

(about meditation) I've tried it, I'm tempted, I like the idea, I tried it on my own first, but I've always gotten into uncomfortable lucid dreams, so I had to let it go. I'm trying to run different videos now where they go through meditation and I certainly believe that, I think that's exactly the kind of mental cleansing or something like that. Or a job of self-consciousness, probably more of that. I think that's fine.

CZ 9

God has no shape and form, God I think is everything around us and in us. I don't have it in any dogmatic way, I pray to God, the late mother-in-law (to "keep an eye" on my friend in distress), in the morning I greet our pear in the garden, thank Mother Earth for its firm footing. Cool, huh?

b) Coping with grief and loss.

HU01

[…] when I first met with grief, I couldn't really process it. Obviously, it was a Catholic family, a Catholic ceremony, we went to Mass afterwards. […] It was then, for the first time, that I felt I believed more in my religion and believed more that the person who had died had been placed in a place of,

say, heaven. And then it was obviously easier to process because I had the belief that yes, he was in a good place and there it was good for him.

HU03

It helped me a lot when I lost my mother. If then I hadn't believed that she was out there and took care of me from there, then […] I would say it straight out, I would have gone cuckoo.

c) Life after death.

- Do you believe in resurrection?

HU06

I don't know. It is so elusive to me. So, it's easier for me to grasp the fact that we die and we move into a different form of existence, a different state of consciousness, than the fact that we're dead, we're dead, and then all of a sudden we lived, it is over, that was it. It may be so, I don't know, but it's elusive for me.

CZ1

I don't quite believe in reincarnation, I'm sure I do in life after death, I'm just not sure if it's in the form we imagine. I think there may be other forms of life. We don't just have to live like humans or caterpillars. I think we can function in some other way, probably a little unconscious, or rather, I see it as energy. The energy that's in us will be elsewhere, we could be in the wind or anywhere. I think that part of my identity and personality is only kept in this body, but part of my consciousness is kept in the overall consciousness, so certainly in what, what will outlive me, so I don't think identity will outlive me, I think consciousness will outlive me.

CZ4

I think I've developed a very rational approach. But then again, if I have any problems, there's this church, so I pray to Christ again. That form of religion, dogmas like the statues of angels in the church, to me, does not constitute contact with a higher power. When I walk in the woods, I get these feelings. Maybe it's some kind of psycho-hygiene thing, but I don't have someone (I don't need) to broker it for me. I can solve internal conflicts on my own, and in Buddhism, when you have problems, there is nothing there to help you. It's very universal, and there's nothing in Zen Buddhism that you can refer to. Maybe it helps if you know you can switch off to something. You need some external form. So when I have problems, I pray to God, but no one even in those churches gave me a form of that direct camaraderie with a higher power.

CZ5

That's just what I like about the Jewish point of view, because according to Judaism, we don't know what's really coming. Here, it's very vaguely defined as the world to come, with no indication of what it's going to be. As it will be, with that world being better, this world has somehow been corrupted. Our responsibility is to try to put it together to make it better than what we got. Yes, I believe in the immortal soul, but it certainly has no concrete form. That is why I like the view of Judaism, which deliberately has no concrete ideas about the other world in this regard.

CZ7 (a Zen/Buddhism/Taoism supporter, originally from a communist and atheist family)

- Do you believe in the existence of a soul? Or do humans have souls, or is consciousness created only by biological reactions in the brain?

People demonstrably – as you can see by the fact that we write to each other – have some mental manifestations. So it can certainly be argued that humans have a soul, part of it is consciousness, and all of this is being created on the basis of biological reactions, a carrier carrying an information system and functions that we barely understand yet. But a whole bunch of those phenomena are entirely tied to a living biological substrate, and only what has been biologically or memetically replicated survives. Nothing like the "immortal soul" has been observed yet.

Institutional and Communal Dimensions

The third dimension we explored is the institutional background of religious orientations and preferences. By institutional, we understand the typical religious institutions such as churches and denominations and, more widely, all other types of institutions, like movements, cults, friendship circles, etc. As Peter L. Berger, among many others, underlined, private persons and society are creative with each other. This means that private persons explain themselves in society, thereby creating society with the same act. Meanwhile, they are created by society. This understanding of the knowledge transfer in modern societies is very relevant for analyzing the institutional dimension of religious orientation. Although private persons possess an exceptional feature in their religiosity, they are still sharing their worldview and *religionview*. As members of a particular society, they are still encountering a variety of religious or quasi-religious orientations and give particular answers.

To sum up, many of our respondents reported having mostly negative and alienating experiences with religion during their childhood, e.g., with the Holy Mass, the crucifix, cold church buildings, etc. If they mentioned any

positive aspects of their religion, they did so only from an outsider perspective, after having left their religion behind.

HU06
It was the first of its kind […] and then we went to church for the Good Friday Mass, which is not exactly a child-friendly story.

HU04
There were crucifixes everywhere on the walls, with Jesus on it, elaborated quite nicely. And for a child under the age of ten, that was pretty horrifying. We were also taken to church by our grandparents, which experience was also horror-like.

HU06
There was an old farmhouse, well, a house of prayer. It was called a chapel. It was not a real chapel, but an old house. I still have the scent in my nose, it was a very nice, whitewashed, very nice, clean, chunky, thick mud-walled building. Sunday Masses were there, and catechism classes were held there on Sunday afternoons. I also attended catechism regularly in that one or two years.

HU05
I didn't have a bad feeling that I had to hand out a newspaper or go to church now.

It is not only historical/mainline church institutions that can be alienating, new religious movement settings and youth religious small communities (n.b.: modern religious settings) can be alienating as well.

HU08
But I felt like I got in there that I had no place there. […] It was visibly fun, good community, but not attractive for me.

HU10
After that, I met a group who called themselves Essenes, and I was able to identify with these doctrines for a very long time. Then, when I was confronted with hierarchical or bureaucratic things at the time, similar to how in the case of Christian religions, with which I could not identify, I moved away from this religious group as well, as I did not feel well in it.

HU10
I continued to look for what I could find myself in, and I had found the moral value system I could identify with at about the age of 17-18. This is called modern witchcraft or the Wicca religion.

In contrast to formal and institutionalized relations, informal relations with people or groups are mentioned consistently with positive connotations.

HU10
Explicitly positive relationships, specifically good relationships, can be said that […] this is also an interesting wording to make friendly relationships. What does a friend mean to me? It can be said that these are usually the closest non-blood relationships around me.

HU08
It all added to my personality. For my rebirth without death.

HU06
I got into a circle of friends a good ten years ago, about ten to eleven years ago, who are not religious but live their lives in an atmosphere inter-woven with such spiritual thinking. That's why I took part in a couple of such occasions. […] I didn't stay there permanently, good relationships, good friendships were born from that experience, we visited for a while.

HU01
He is more involved with these spiritual practices. He is this "fire-walking" type […]. I am not so much involved in these practices, however, we discuss our thoughts and influence each other in a way.

- Do you connect with others who share your beliefs and view of the world?

CZ09
Rather, I find it so with existing friends, and oddly enough, we agree with some of them on many things, which is surprising. On the other hand, I don't seek out friends based on beliefs. I like to write about these things with my friends.

Conclusion: Ecclesial and Pastoral Remarks

After outlining the dimensions of leaving and finding religion, it is useful to come back to our introductory remarks. As we have argued, simplistic categorizations are useful and comprehensive in politics and in maintaining institutional interests. Churches, as institutions, have interests in two different respects: first, the self-understanding of churches as societal entities; second, the consequence of a church's identity concerning the fulfillment of its mission in society. Without wishing to refer to the various theoretical considerations concerning churches and their social positions, it is crucial to be aware of the regional characteristics of the ecclesial-political identity of churches.

In both Czech and Hungarian societies, church representatives seem to have a kind of hard pressing collective spiritual status. The sources for that

are clear and simple. The previously mentioned memory of persecution pushed churches to the margins of society. Church representatives and theologians also use an inherited dichotomic categorization in their thinking about a church: church members and institutions on one side, and society with unchurched, areligious, or anti-religious individuals on the other side. This kind of ecclesial categorization evokes and enforces a feature of the outside society as secularized and hostile. Churches think they should assert themselves against the "outside" society. In the Czech Republic, the outside society is understood as atheistic; in Hungary, it is seen as nonreligious.

The main consequence of this type of dichotomic approach is the fundamental logic of church mission. Churches think they have the divine goods, and they should carry them "abroad" to hostile societies. The societies outside of the churches do not have the grace or the divine goods, and the more fully secularized societies do not even seem to need the grace. Dichotomic categorization of society did not allow churches to have an intensive dialogue with society. This type of ecclesial understanding of society and culture is reminiscent of the time of conflict between the Catholic Church and the modern period in the nineteenth century. The Catholic Church's representatives, headed by the Pius-popes, used to communicate with society and with the Zeitgeist in a kind of unquestionable manner, but the Catholic Church as an institution rapidly lost its position of power. This basically self-dependent situation of the Church led to an apologetical ecclesiology and missionary strategy, which is, *mutatis mutandis,* the same matrices of self-understanding and teaching logic we observe in Central and Eastern European societies today. Although these societies are very different regarding the level of religiosity, their ecclesiology seems to be very similar.

From the social scientific point of view, and based on the recent study, we argue for a non-dichotomic understanding of society, not least in the interest of a more appropriate understanding of the chances of church mission. If churches were able to recognize the varieties of religiosity and nonreligiosity in society, they could be more involved in the recent public discourses about the main reason and values of living together.

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The Roles of Religious Socialization and Intergenerational Memory in the Process of "Atheization" of Czech Society:
Preliminary Conclusions from the First Phase of Qualitative Research

DAVID VÁCLAVÍK

Initial Hypotheses and Research Design

In the past several years, a series of studies and treatises have been published dealing with analyses of the attitude of the Czech public towards religion.[1] They involved a rather harsh view on the widespread notion claiming that Czech society is currently the most atheistic society in Europe, as suggested by Keysar and Navarro-Rivera 2013).[2] The nature of such criticism is based on the argument that the idea of the high rate of atheization of Czech society comes from an inadequate understanding of the characteristics of contemporary Czech religiosity, the key aspect of which is a relatively significant tendency to privatize and individualize religiosity linked to a strong mistrust of traditional religious institutions and organizations. This argument, however, is grounded on historic-anthropological analyses as well as selected research (ISSP[3], DIN[4], EVS[5]), which the aforementioned authors

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[1] See David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost* (Praha: Grada, 2010); David Václavík, Dana Hamplová, and Zdeněk Nešpor, "Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society," *Central European Journal of Contemporary Religion* 4, no. 2 (2018): 99-122; Zdeněk R. Nešpor, *Náboženství v 19. století. Nejcírkevnější století, nebo období zrodu českého ateismu?* (Praha: Scriptorium, 2010); Zdeněk R. Nešpor, *Česká a slovenská religiozita po rozpadu společného státu. Náboženství Dioskúrů* (Praha: Karolinum, 2020); Jakub Havlíček, *Imagining Religion in the Czech Republic. Anthropological Perspectives* (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2021); Tomáš Havlíček, ed., *Postsekularismus v Česku. Trendy a regionální souvislosti* (Praha: P3K, 2020); Jan Váně, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuities of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2018).

[2] See Andrew M. Greeley, *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium: A Sociological Profile* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003); Irena Borowik et al., "Central and Eastern Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, eds. Steven Bullivant and Mark Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 622-637; A. Keysar and J. Navarro-Rivera, "A World of Atheism: Global Demographies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, eds. Steven Bullivant and Mark Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 553-586.

[3] International Social Survey Programme (1999, 2009, 2019).

[4] Detraditionalization and Deinstitualization of Religion in the Czech Republic (2006).

[5] European Values Study (2017).

claim prove the unfounded and no longer sustainable attitude of mistaking Czech atheism for Czech individualized and privatized spirituality.[6]

Results of this research cast doubts on the deeply rooted and often proclaimed stereotypes of Czechs as the most atheistic nation in the world. Simultaneously, the results show the necessity to perceive the Czech example, at least within the context of the countries of the former Soviet bloc, as an example of a specific kind requiring the search for another alternative theoretic framework so as to interpret the relation of religion and society in present-day Central and Eastern Europe.[7]

However, several studies have recently been published on such attitudes among a certain segment of Czech society that cannot unambiguously be identified as expressions of individualized and deinstitutionalized forms of religiosity. Rather, they reflect dismissive or skeptical attitudes toward religion. As such, they could indeed be more adequately identified as atheistic. From among those key studies, one can explicitly mention "Freethinkers and Atheists in the Czech Lands in the 20th Century"[8] and "Czech Republic: The Promised Land for Atheists?"[9].

Both of them seek to theoretically and methodologically grasp the phenomenon of Czech atheism in the context of current debates on the theme of nonreligion. While the former pursues an in-depth analysis of institutionalized forms of explicit or analytical atheism,[10] the latter focuses on additional

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[6] These authors tend to quote a relatively frequently quoted project, *Political Culture in Central and Eastern Europe* (hereinafter referred to as "PCE") led by the German sociologist Detlef Pollack, which focused on the position of religion in eleven post-communist countries. According to this research, only 28% of Czechs declared themselves to be members of a church or a religious society, only 31% trusted churches, 11% participated in religious ceremonies frequently (at least once a month), and 41% of respondents claimed to believe in God. At the same time, 41% of Czechs believed in reincarnation fully or partially, 64% in a functioning astrology, and 43% in the possibility of being healed by faith. For more details, see Detlef Pollack and Olaf Müller, "Religiousness in Central and Eastern Europe: Towards Individualization?," in *Religious Churches and Religiosity in Post-communist Europe*, ed. Irena Borowik (Krakow: Nomos, 2006), 22-36.

[7] See Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*.

[8] Tomáš Bubík and David Václavík, "Freethinkers and Atheists in the Czech Lands in the 20th Century," in *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Development of Secularity and Non-Religion*, eds. Tomáš Bubík, Atko Remmel, and David Václavík (New York/London: Routledge, 2020), 58-84.

[9] Roman Vido et al., "Czech Republic: The Promised Land for Atheists?," in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion. Sociology of Atheism*, vol. 7, eds. R. Cipriani and F. Garelli (Leiden: Brill 2016), 201-232.

[10] In our understanding, the term "explicit" or "analytical" atheism refers to the explicit or implicit rejection of religious concepts based on a rational and analytical approach that blocks or even rewrites the intuitive support for religious images and, conversely, buttresses religious skepticism. One expression of this type of atheism represents New Atheism related with authors such as R. Dawkins, C. Hitchens, S. Harris, or D. Dennett. In the Czech context, it is much more often connected with and

forms and expressions of contemporary Czech nonreligion, which are often interpreted as expressions of Czech atheism. Nevertheless, both papers agree that the actual impact of explicit/analytical atheism on the attitudes of Czech people toward religion are largely overestimated. There are many reasons for this. Yet, there are several important reasons to refuse to interpret the current religious situation in Czech society as a manifestation or consequence of analytical atheism.

The first reason is that this type of atheism is linked to a specific intellectual attitude, the real influence of which on society and its activities is often overestimated because it requires continuous rational reflection and correction related thereto.[11] This is impossible to expect on a wider scale and will always be confined to a relatively small circle of intellectual or political elites, who may have sufficiently efficient tools of power to make their attitudes official. Yet, given the exigence of the mechanism of passing over and preservation of such ideas and attitudes related to them, their real and long-term influence will be rather small and, above all, will be determined by other external factors in a significant manner. This may explain why the contemporary Czech society's attitude towards religion is so different from that of Slovak society, even though both were parts of a single state, communist Czechoslovakia with a Marxist state ideology.[12]

Another reason is that the majority of contemporary analyses, whether sociological or historic, show rather well that the communist regime was not the main cause of the problematic relationship of Czech society toward religion. The regime only helped deepen the former distrust of religious institutions and strengthen the religious indifferentism already present among a

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expressed by ideological systems such as Enlightenment-scientist atheism propagated, for example, by the Volná myšlenka (Free Thought) movement or Marxist atheism. Both schools of thought had a number of common denominators. First, they were both rooted in the Enlightenment view that religion poses an obstacle to knowledge on account of its presumed irrationality. Second, they both held a strict anti-clericalism. However, other interpretations of "their" atheism differed. The Free Thought movement linked atheism specifically to the positivistic concept of the development of the human mind in three stages, interpreting religion as a speculative, thus empirically unfounded, way to explain the world, which cannot be verified and must, thence, be rejected. Religion is, therefore, conceived of as an anthesis (not a competitor) to science that no longer has a place as a way of interpreting the world in modern society. As a result, it needs to be fully replaced by an "exact, unambiguous, and verifiable" interpretation. In contrast, Marxist ideological atheism was based on the Marxist interpretation of religion as a product of false, alienated consciousness whose true essence was completely disclosed by Marxism as a "scientific world-view."

[11] See David Václavík, "Role intelektuálů v procesu ateizace české společnosti v 2. polovině 20. století a její transformace," in *Slavia Meridionalis* 20 (2020), https://ispan.waw.pl/journals/index.php/sm/issue/view/117/showToc.

[12] See Miroslav Tížik, *Náboženstvo vo verejnom živote na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2011); Nešpor, *Česká a slovenská religiozita po rozpadu společného státu.*

significant part of the population. It did not cause an intentional atheization of Czech society.[13]

A question comes to mind as to whether contemporary Czech atheism, rather than being a result of political-ideological influences, might be a product of the advancing modernization of Czech society. In this process, an important role was played by the paternalistic state with quite an extensive and relatively functional social system, augmented by some other factors, including, notably, the demographic changes after 1945 that led to the ethnic and cultural homogenization of Czech society. The conclusions from the papers cited above,[14] as well as some conclusions from the white paper on Czech religiosity, elaborated as part of the research project on the *Future of Religions*,[15] thus lead us to argue that the so-called Czech atheism should, in fact, be construed as a result of religious apatheism, which finds expression in a high degree of indifference to religious issues rather than in conscious refusal of religious faith. However, the role of religious socialization seems to be of major importance, especially in the context of parent-child relations. If we perceive religiosity as a cultural or symbolic system integrating certain values, norms, meanings, and patterns of behavior, it will then become clear that its content must be appropriated by an individual during his/her life.

The first timid attempts to verify the validity of this hypothesis for the Czech context have recently begun to emerge. Alongside the cited paper, "Czech Republic: The Promised Land for Atheists?" which focuses primarily on the level of theoretical conceptualization and considers its application to Czech settings, one can also mention some conclusions published in *Continuity and Discontinuities in Religious Memories*.[16] Nonetheless, this theme has not yet been systematically treated much.

Therefore, the research project, "Faith and Beliefs of 'Nonbelievers'," provided a framework for designing a pilot project to explore the role of religious socialization and religious memory in the process of forming (ir)religious identities of the Czech population today. The core of this pilot project lies in gathering interviews/statements that will provide data for qualitative analyses aimed at the above-discussed phenomena of religious

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[13] See Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*; Václavík et al., "Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society"; Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Sto let Českobratrské církve evangelické a Církve československé (husitské): Náboženské organizace, společenská poptávka a racionalita řízení," *Český časopis historický* 116, no. 4 (2018): 1059-1078.

[14] Vido et al., "Czech Republic: The Promised Land for Atheists?."

[15] David Václavík, Dana Hamplová, and Zdeněk Nešpor. "White Paper. Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society," in *The Future of Religious Faith from a Central and Eastern European Perspective*, eds. Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hosek (Prague: Institute for Sociology of SAS, 2017), http://www.budoucnostnabozenstvi.cz/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/WHITE-PAPER_CZ_FINAL.pdf (accessed September 23, 2022).

[16] Váně, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuities of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic*.

socialization, the role of religious memory (especially with respect to its discontinuity in the last ca. 80 years), and, last but not least, further related phenomena (e.g., the role and function of religious literacy). The interviews are designed according to the method of semi-structured interviews; they will be analyzed based on discursive and contextual analysis. In 2020, eight interviews were conducted to identify initial hypotheses and a basic structure of the landscape.

In addition to the research goals specified above, the project has yet another significant dimension, namely, the involvement of early-career researchers, which facilitates the placing of the research theme on the radar of younger generations. For this reason, students at the Faculty of Science, Humanities and Education of Technical University of Liberec were involved in the pilot data collection. In total, eight students underwent theoretical training in March through June 2020. The training included research ethics, the basic principles of qualitative research, and data collection management. The training also included designing and discussing a questionnaire draft. Like the select themes of semi-structured questionnaires, the selection of interviewees sought to consider intergenerational communication vis-à-vis religion, the role of religion especially for the primary socialization of the interviewees, and the significance and impact of family memory on shaping the relationship of the individual interviewees to religion. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, unfortunately, all interviews had to take place via online platforms only, a process which inhibited data collection. The original intention was to return to the collected data in the fall semester of 2020 by way of seminars and workshops with students and invited specialists in order to analyze the data. Such analysis would then help formulate preliminary findings and, if necessary, modify the hypotheses for further research. However, this intention could not be realized because the epidemiological situation substantially worsened in the fall. The planned workshops thus could not be organized.

Description of the Situation

Although the collected set of interviews is still too small to enable any deeper analysis, even this sample already shows that the initial hypotheses are highly relevant. The general socio-cultural background of the individual interviewees and, especially, the direct influence of immediate family play a crucial role in establishing relationships and attitudes toward religion, both positively and negatively. It became clear that in the case of most respondents who were between the age of 40 and 70 years old, religion had not been a major topic in their immediate families. When responding to the question about the attitude their immediate family had toward religion, most of them responded: "We did not speak about it." If some of the interviewees who had not been raised in religious families recalled any memories related to religion,

they would mostly concern the fact that someone in their wider family was religious and people knew that s/he went to church.

In this respect, it is interesting that most of the material collected so far confirms the fact that religiosity is, in the opinion of most interviewees, connected with religious institutions, on the one hand, and rituals (prayers, participation in the liturgy, etc.), on the other. In contrast, religion is rarely explicitly connected with value orientation (or, unlike institutions and rituals, value orientation is not usually directly mentioned as a feature of religiosity of the individual in question) or some other specific hermeneutic framework that might well be postulated ("I think that grandma probably believed in God because she sometimes prayed"). Religiosity itself is still perceived, first and foremost, through the lens of religiously interpreted behavior.

If it seems that religion is not (or, has not been for a significant part of one's life) a major theme for most interviewees, the question then is what does religion mean in particular. Is it a consequence of systematic indoctrination that also took place in families before 1989, in addition to official institutions (school, media, etc.)? Or is it a result of the incompatibility between religious behavior and modern life-style? Or is it an expression of something else altogether? It seems that neither systemic atheization nor intentional secularization play any major role in the clearly visible process of the decreasing significance of religion in the respondents' individual lives. If their influence is to be identified at all, it is indirect and somewhat episodic (i.e., "I have never been interested in things like that, but I remember how we were told in school that religion makes people dumb"). It seems, therefore, that the irrelevance of religion in the personal lives of many interviewees is by and large a product of a certain unintelligibility as well as the absence of the meaning and role of religion in the process of their socialization. In other words, the fact that religion did not play any important role in the lives of the interviewees is generally not a result of them or their family consciously identifying themselves over or against religion. Rather, the reason is that they do not see religion as important and beneficial and do not understand it. This finding corresponds with the fact that religion and views related therewith are not explicitly condemned, small exceptions notwithstanding. If condemnations appear at all, they concern certain aspects, and not religion as such. Instead, religion is viewed as something personal that the interviewee actually does not understand much. In sum, the attitude of most interviewees toward religion is apatheistic rather than atheistic.

Another important finding is that this attitude was, for most interviewees, formed as early as their childhood and adolescence by merely copying the patterns adopted from their immediate family. Therefore, it might perhaps be appropriate to speak of a kind of socialized apatheism that was affected, in addition to relatively clearly identifiable factors, such as the insignificance of religion for the legitimization of some key aspects of the socialization process (e.g., value system, symbolic framework, etc.) by a certain unintelligibility of religion, as documented by statements of younger interviewees in particular.

However, the factors mentioned above cannot be understood to mean that the religious apatheism of the majority of the Czech interviewees (and the majority of the Czech population in general, as many experts assert) were invariable. In their responses, many interviewees indicate that they are sensitive to and open to being addressed by some religious or, more precisely, spiritual aspects in certain situations. However, they do not, by and large, see these as something religious (the term religion has traditionally had rather negative connotations in the Czech context) but, rather, as something spiritual. Many people admit that there is something beyond us, that there is some higher purpose. Many research projects focused on Czech religiosity have proven this thesis in the last thirty years.[17] It could therefore be maintained that this Czech apatheism is, at the same time, connected with a certain degree of irrationality and the tendency toward individualized and privatized forms of religiosity, which are not, to be sure, linked by their agents to religion. Rather, these forms are understood as alternative expressions of irreligious systems, such as science, philosophy, or general human wisdom.

Conclusions and Future Prospects

As stated above, the collected data sample is too small and too specific to allow for drawing any clear conclusions. Despite these limitations, we believe that the data can represent a useful tool to identify other surveys and analyses in the future and formulate certain implementation measures.

As for further analyses, we believe that it will be useful to focus on the process of (ir)religious socialization in detail with the aim of analyzing its structure, aspects, and presuppositions. In this respect, it will be appropriate to particularly focus on phenomena such as the continuity and discontinuity of cultural and social memory, identifying the external factors that reinforce the tendency toward apatheization vis-à-vis religion in the socialization process (e.g., the role of value orientations, public structures, etc.). Also it seems useful to explore the processes of transmitting the social and cultural skills that are directly connected with various types of (ir)religious orientation.

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[17] Traditional religious views connected with institutionalized religiosity, such as the belief in heaven, hell, or resurrection, are of a relatively minor significance. In the surveys that have been considered (DIN 2006, AUFBRUCH 2007, ISSP 2009), less than 30% of the respondents identified with these traditional views. Conversely, beliefs such as the healing power of amulets, fortune-telling, or horoscopes are acceptable to more than 40% of the respondents, while, in some instances (e.g., the possibility of foreseeing the future), the proportion of affirmative responses exceeds 50%. Here, too, it can be asserted that increasingly in the foreground are those beliefs that better correspond to the subjective spirituality of the late modern consumer. For more detail, see David Václavík, Dana Hamplová, and Zdeněk Nešpor, "Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society," *Central European Journal of Contemporary Religion* 4, no. 2 (2018): 99-122.

Thus, the most appropriate implementation measures seem to be those that strengthen possible communication among respective generations, opening a space for the articulation and identification of certain problems related with the perception of religion in the life of concrete individuals. Somewhat figuratively speaking, the primary task is to break the silence about the themes related to religiosity in its various forms. It is also for this reason that we would, in the future, like to continue with the collection of data/statements performed by young people. We thereby hope not only to create a relatively broad database of interviews but also to establish a discussion platform that will allow young people in particular to share their experiences with how the phenomenon of religion has been communicated with their family and friends.

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From Nones to Yeses: Pastoral Care among the Nones in Central Europe

ANDRÁS MÁTÉ-TÓTH

Defining and characterizing the social group of the nones need not only be based on empirical data and personal impressions. Empirical data is obtained by formulating questions and collecting answers to the questions asked. The answers depend on the questions. If we identify the group of the nones primarily with negative qualities or deficiencies, our questions will also be framed in terms of something negative. As a result, we will approach the group of nones primarily from a position of lack. If we define the nones from the outset as characterized by a non-churched religiosity, a non-Christian religiosity, or a nonreligious grounding of morals, then we will inevitably draw a line between religion and nonreligion. Nones will thus comprise the nonreligion social group. If we take the personal impressions of pastors as a basis, then the nones will become representatives of a kind of other side, a kind of marginal situation. Pastors are ambassadors of God and the Christian church, seeking to bring people to God and the community of churches. Those who cannot be won over to the God of Christians and lured into the ritual communion of the churches are viewed as failures on behalf of the pastoral ministry. Nones are seen as primarily outsiders and in opposition to the Christian church. On one side there is the church committed to the God of Christians; on the other side there are the nones who are insecure and un-churched and opposed to the God of Christians. This is the case in the personal experience of pastors, at least, who have encountered many failures. Either empirically or experientially, there is a strong temptation to identify the group of the nones with atheists and anti-churches and, as a result, to define any pastoral strategy and behavior toward the nones along these lines.

In this essay, I attempt to draw a more nuanced picture of the category of the nones and, in so doing, take a more communicative pastoral approach.

The Nones Are the Majority of Society

The results of sociological research on religion show that, in terms of religiosity, the majority of respondents choose a religious category whereby they define themselves as religious in their own way. This is also the case in the societies of Central Europe.[1] Questionnaires that do not use the category of the religious in their own way use categories of belief in God and atheism. These results show that the majority do not clearly believe in God but are not clearly atheists either. While the data show an atheist majority in the Czech

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[1] I will not consider the results from outside this region in this paper.

Republic, it is fair to say that the majority of atheist respondents are more likely to be apatheists. In other words, they are not characterized by direct opposition to God, but by alienation from a certain image of God and the intellectual and moral requirements associated with it.

It follows from all this that the *Zeitgeist* is primarily the spirituality of the nones. We can see that clear and stable religious and other value preferences constitute the extremes of society, while weak and unstable preferences constitute the overwhelming majority. Unquestioning belief in God and unwavering atheism have become two extremes in Central Europe. The societies of this region are characterized more by uncertainties, with an intermediate state as the general majority state between these two extremes.

Hence, pastoral care must first and foremost seek an answer to the question of how it relates to the majority of society. It is inadequate to speak of atheists in terms of nones and to adopt the basic stance of anti-God and anti-church dialogue. It is particularly important to be critical of the idioms and permanent expressions that stigmatize and give negative connotations to those who belong to the nones. Such terms include immoral, communist, or atheist. It is as if the broad social stratum of nones were a legacy of materialist, anti-religious, and anti-clerical political forces. In contrast, those who have a close relationship with the Christian church, and believe in the God of Christians, are the faithful who persevere to the end. If we focus on these two extremes in pastoral understanding, we are, in fact, building a bridge between them. On the bridge, the traffic is one-way, from the pastoral mission to the atheists. Experience shows that traffic in the opposite direction is extremely rare, that is, atheists approach Christianity's offerings only rarely, if at all. The greater difficulty, however, is that in this bridge-building, we are, in fact, bypassing the majority of society and forgetting to communicate with the very majority with whom we should be communicating in the first place.

For many people who have grown up in traditional large church communities, belonging to a conservative church and believing in God are inseparable. If church systems and faith in God are about equivalent to each other, then believers are presented with a serious choice. Either they leave their church and thus God, or they remain in their church and thus leave themselves. This is the tension that provokes the nones' position.[2] Dialogical pastoral care must seek to be able to separate faith in God from church systems. It should see the communities of the churches as communities in search of God, and, in that search, it should be able to identify with the community of the nones who, in some cases, have moved away from God because they have had to move away from their church. In those societies where, for many decades, the dominant propaganda has made every effort to discredit the churches, while, at the same time, making it impossible for the churches to express their own views in public due to strict censorship, the discrediting of

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[2] James B. Gould, "A Pastoral Theology of Disenfranchised Doubt and Deconversion from Restrictive Religious Groups," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 31, no. 1 (2021): 35-53, https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2020.1824172.

the churches has been accompanied by the discrediting of God. This is one explanation for the phenomenon of the nones in Central European societies – notwithstanding that the religious maps of the four countries differ considerably, which will be discussed more in the next section. The churches in this region not only carry the legacy of the communist rule but have, themselves, contributed to the loss of social prestige in the thirty years since the regime change.

If we take the above insights seriously, we might ultimately go so far as to label the term nones itself as inappropriate for pastoral thinking and strategy. After all, nones means to say "no" to something, to be on the outside of something. What the majority of the nones distance themselves from is the divine and ecclesial perspective that is held in high esteem by a minority of churchly believers. Of course, church thinking and language can start from the assumption in its own sociography that the majority is different from the church minority. But if the aim is to characterize the majority in this way because it follows the lines along which the main characteristics of a relevant pastoral approach can be developed, then the term nones is not appropriate since, for them, what is of greatest importance is precisely that which is of little or no importance to ecclesial religiosity. If we are really interested in the nones as a majority, if we are really interested in their own self-definition, then we need to focus on what those who say yes to monotheism are saying no to. Put another way, a dialogical pastoral stance seeks to find the yeses of the nones.

In this respect, it is instructive to observe the addressees of the papal encyclicals of the twentieth century. Prior to Pope Paul VI, the addressees of the encyclicals were the clergy and the faithful in communion with the Catholic Church. Paul VI was perhaps the first to add the phrase "and to all men of good will" to the traditional addressees of his encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* from August 1964.[3] With this addition, he indicated that his message was addressed to all people, not only to the clergy and the faithful, but also to the widest circle of recipients, all men of good will. This designation of addressee is also a resolution, which is decisive for the pastoral paradigm. The Church sees the human being primarily as a person of good will, which has deep theological roots, going back to Jesus, St Paul, and St Augustine. The dialogical ecclesiology does not concentrate on the sense in which the majority of society can be considered nones but focuses, rather, on the sense in which its yeses can be considered. The Church sees the human being as first and foremost a person of good will, who seeks the good and strives to do it.

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[3] Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html: "To His Venerable Brethren the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries who are at Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See, to the Clergy and faithful of the entire world, and to all men of good will."

The Nones Are the Majority of Church Members

Another important finding of sociological polls on religion is that the vast majority of the baptized are not religious according to the Church's teaching and do not participate in the liturgical life of the Church, i.e., do not attend Sunday Mass regularly. This phenomenon is explained by a number of internationally accepted theories. For example, Grace Davie describes this as "belonging without believing."[4] Christians in Central Europe are cultural Christians rather than Christ-followers, as current canon law calls the baptized who are theologically considered members of the Church. In the four Central European countries, there is a different but significant overlap between the baptized and the unchurched, as well as the nones. As Max Weber noted, the Church is an institution of which one becomes a member by being born into it. Membership in a church does not, therefore, in itself reveal anything about one's personal religiosity and behavior. It also follows from this context that pastoral care must adopt a dialogical stance not only towards the non-baptized nones outside the Church but also towards the nones who are in the majority among the members of the Church.

In this context, the distinction made by Robert Wuthnow,[5] José Casanova, and Charles Taylor[6] between seekers and dwellers are apt for this region. Those who are religious, and/or nones who are, in their own way, far from ecclesiastical religiosity and behavior, can all be considered seekers. This is not in order to somehow incorporate them into the ecclesial sphere of interest, or to diminish the weight of church apostasy and pastoral failures when referring to them. Instead, this is because it is the best way to take really seriously those with whom we want to discuss topics like evangelism, the communion of the Church, and the love of God. The English word companionship is a fitting way of expressing this objective. The Church can think of the nones as a community of well-meaning people who are seekers, searching for meaning and happiness in life, and with whom churches want to form a companionship for this search.

Pastors and the Nones

There are probably also psychological reasons why professional clergy do not devote themselves to the category of the nones.[7] These reasons are

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[4] Grace Davie, "Believing Without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?," *Social Compass* 37, no. 4 (1990): 455-469, https://doi.org/10.1177/003 776890037004004.

[5] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

[6] Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean, eds., *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012).

[7] I am grateful to Jan Jandourek for the valuable additions in this section.

economic in various senses of the word. Nones are not part of the Christian community; they do not contribute to it either with money or with activities. If pastors were to devote their energy to them, they would be missing marks for the rest of their spiritual flock. Nones cannot be reported as successes in a church's baptism and confirmation statistics. Church marriage figures are always suspect because it is not clear whether the occasion was used to convey at least some spiritual content to the betrothed or whether it was merely a ritual assist to enhance the aesthetic impression of the ceremony. At most, nones improve the statistics of church funerals, which is not considered a pastoral achievement. Their proximity to church communities would also disrupt the normal and established way of doing things.

Nones as individuals have needs that pastors can theoretically fill but, often, the pastors do not have the necessary qualifications to do so. They are trained for spiritual direction and not spiritual accompaniment, which can also mean that the accompanied will eventually separate and go elsewhere. The traditional pastor's role description is to watch over orthodoxy, which is exactly what the nones are not interested in at all. Pastors are supposed to speak authoritatively (or so they think) on matters of morality in general and also on individual morality, which the nones consider a private matter.

An understanding of the nones and a willingness to attend to them would require a different type of clergy who are not so tightly tied to the regular church operations. It would be necessary to open up clergy membership to include people who also have a civic vocation. On one side, the pastoral care among the nones requires church leaders who are able to interfere with their life and work. On the other side, if there are pastors who match the qualities and needs raised by the nones, they are often considered eccentric figures in their own community.

The Nones Are a Consequence of the Loss of Faith in Traditional Institutions

In order to understand the characteristics and sensibilities of the nones, it is necessary to clarify certain social traditions and legacies. A key option for an approach based on historical retrospection is how far back in history we go. Taking into account the specificities of the region, and in particular the prominence of national, nation-state aspects, it is necessary to start the series of historical explanations at the mid-nineteenth century. For all four countries, the lost or not-yet-won nation-state aspirations were the main political and cultural axis, which also had a significant impact on the dimensions of religiosity and ecclesiasticism.

Poland, the largest modern state in the region, lost its independence in 1793 and became a colony of three great powers: Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Only after the First World War (1918) did Poland regain its independence. Hungary became part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after the 1848 War of Independence because full state autonomy failed, and this dual state was

created in 1867: one part was the Austrian Empire and the other the Kingdom of Hungary. The monarchy ended with the First World War when two-thirds of Hungary's territory was inherited by the successor states, including Czechoslovakia. The Czech Republic was a hereditary province of the Habsburgs (from 1620) until the break-up of the German-Roman Empire (1806) and became part of the Habsburg Empire. It gained partial independence as part of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Slovakia's national awakening movements date back to the nineteenth century, and it enjoyed partial statehood with the Czech Republic under the statehood of Czechoslovakia. Then, in 1939, Czechoslovakia was briefly dissolved, and Slovakia gained its first partial independence, which was ended by the Paris Peace Treaty at the end of World War II, restoring Czechoslovakia to the 1939 status quo. Both states, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic gained finally their independence in 1993.

However great the differences in history, geography, and cultural traditions between the four countries in general, the tradition of the struggle for nation-state autonomy deeply shapes their social and cultural sensitivities and reflexes. After the Second World War, the countries fell behind the Iron Curtain as part of the Soviet zone. Although they had independent state parastatals, they were not able to operate under the total dictatorship of the Communist Party, which was controlled by Moscow. True nation-state autonomy became a reality after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In terms of religiosity and the nones, the centuries-long struggle for national independence and the memory of that struggle is a significant factor. In Polish history the Catholic Church was the most capable of defending and representing national interests, whereas in the Czech Republic, the Catholic Church was the wheelwright of national interests. In Hungary, during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Catholicism was pro-monarchy, but Protestantism was pro-independence. In Slovakia, the high Catholic clergy (Tiso) supported Hitler's policy of achieving national independence.

Those who see the churches as representatives and defenders of national interests are basing their views on cultural Christianity and national Christianity. Those, on the other hand, who see the churches as an obstacle to or opponent of the national cause are likely to represent the cultural-nones or the national-nones. For the former group, the social behavior of the churches after the regime change is less of a burden on their loyalty to the churches than it is for the latter group. These historically-rooted attitudes were reinforced by the communist rule, which was strongly anti-religious and anti-clerical. They have also been reinforced by the extreme nationalism of the last decade, which has pushed the cultural-religious base in the direction of radical nationalism and the cultural-nonreligious base in the opposite direction. This explains how Poles have become more Catholic, Czechs more atheist, and how Slovakia and Hungary have become more religiously divided. Radicalization thus increases the secularization process and increases the camp of the cultural-nones.

It cannot, of course, be argued that the proportions and characteristics of religiosity and the nones in these countries can be attributed solely to the historical legacy mentioned above. However, it can be reasonably argued that these factors play a significant role in the development of a context-sensitive pastoral stance.

A Dialogical Approach

The Greek word for dialogue means a conversational exchange between two persons or groups. This means that both sides have their say. Churches have been striving to develop a basic stance – throughout their histories with fluctuating intensity – which is not exclusively as teaching churches, but also as learning, listening churches. Understanding and deepening the above-mentioned factors is only one of the conditions for a dialogue that promises results. The other is to review church communication logics and routines in terms of whether they help or hinder dialogue with the nones and witnessing among them. The Christian church in every age has responded to the social context, developing its knowledge of God, its teaching, and its witness in response to the challenges faced. Among others, Rémi Brague,[8] writing in the 1990s, stressed the eccentric nature of Europe and of Christianity in Europe. The primary characteristic of European, Western Christianity is that it has developed its own religious identity in meaningful dialogue with cultures outside itself. Christian culture is an eccentric culture. In the global context of culture today, it is becoming less and less clear what can be called European and what can be called non-European. But Christian eccentricity is, today, even more of a primary requirement for the shaping of the churches' attitudes and communication emphases. An introspective church hides the Gospel; an introspective church bears witness to it.

Katarzyna Parzych-Blakiewicz's 2007 study[9] has listed the challenges for theology and Catholic Church thinking in dialogue with atheists and non-believers:

1) The following problems require in-depth reflection and broader discussion: anthropomorphic image of God; 'demythologization' of religion through the criticism of superstitions; initiation of the dialogue about Jesus Christ in the context of the philosophy of post-modernism and relativism;

2) Academic communities, particularly those with ecclesiastical faculties have the right conditions for interdisciplinary debates. These possibilities should be used to conduct dialogue with atheists and nonbelievers;

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[8] Rémi Brague, "Orient und Okzident: Modelle 'Römischer' Christenheit," in *Das Europa Der Religionen*, ed. Otto Kallscheuer (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1996), 45-66.

[9] Katarzyna Parzych-Blakiewicz, "'Dialog' I 'Dialogiczność' Jako Narzędzia Teologii," *Teologia w Polsce* 1, no. 1 (2007): 137-148.

3) The development of communication with the public requires the Church to be ready to properly absorb and interpret the content of mass culture and to form structures responsible for media content.

In connection with this list, and somewhat extending it, we can say that a shift of emphasis in theological thinking and church communication in Central Europe is needed. In the immediate aftermath of the regime change, churches understandably sought secure guarantees for their own existence and functioning. Regardless of how much this search for security corresponded to the basic stance of Jesus as God's wandering people, or of St. Francis in solidarity with the vulnerable, the era of freedom after forty years of oppression also encouraged the churches to be part of the new possibilities. This process of re-stabilization undoubtedly had benefits. Churches (re)-provided buildings, funding, and legal frameworks. But, inevitably, there were also downsides. Churches became political actors and lost the intimacy and trust in society that they had enjoyed in the first years immediately after the regime change. Today, we can say that the conditions under which churches operate are stable in central European societies. Indeed, they have become the spoiled institutions of right-wing governments. In this safe environment, the Jewish prophetic criticism of church buildings and the comfort of pastors becomes relevant again: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel, who feed themselves!" (Ez. 34, 2).

The shift in emphasis in the understanding of revelation means that the Catholic Church must understand the deposit of faith as a process of understanding and not as property to be guarded. In theology, the phenomenon and dynamics of dogma history and dogma development are well known. However much uncertainty there may be in the present cultural and ecclesial context, the Church cannot remain locked in the exclusive spaces of its knowledge of God and salvation; rather, it must join the wanderers of contemporary society with this knowledge. As underlined in the vision of the Church of the Second Vatican Council, the Church is God's wandering people, wandering with humanity in all its historical stages and in all its cultural identities. The emphasis is based on a theological anthropology that sees the human being first and foremost not as a sinner, but as a person of goodwill who can benefit from the graces of freedom that come from salvation. As for the community of the Church, what is needed is a theological sociology that conceives of society as a community of solidarity, common good, and mercy. These are, among other things, the ecclesial and theological emphases that are present in the pastoral work among the nones and which have also found a place, to some extent, in the documents of the dicastery, especially in the encyclicals and other addresses of Pope Francis. In a letter, Pope Francis writes: "The time has now finally come, ushered in by the Second Vatican

Council, for a dialogue that is open and free of preconceptions, and which reopens the doors to a responsible and fruitful encounter."[10]

The Themes of Dialogue Are the Themes of Convivence

Dialogue with nonbelievers and atheists, on the part of the Church, focused primarily on religious truths and was based on a kind of defense of the faith. However, the newer dogmatic and pastoral approach conceives of dialogue as a thread of different positions and initiatives on the main questions of humanity. One sign of this change of approach was the incorporation of the secretariat of the nonbelievers, which had previously operated in the Vatican, into the Pontifical Commission for Culture. This decision is an indication that the Church is not primarily concerned with nonbelievers, but with the challenges that are emerging in today's culture. It is a question of the life and survival of human civilization and the whole globe. This is the greatest challenge facing humanity, and the Church wishes to join with all people of goodwill in understanding and addressing it. This change of perspective was partly brought about by the Church at the Second Vatican Council. It is also needed by those in society who define themselves as nones. This change of perspective implies a rethinking of certain inherited logics and reflexes, which also entails a certain uncertainty. The abandonment of the old, well-established worldview building blocks and the acquisition of dialogical thinking requires a great intellectual and spiritual effort. However, the goal of coexistence and mutual solidarity between people of different persuasions is of such weight that it is worth the work of intense self-reflection.

This is all the more so because one of the main characteristics of today's *Zeitgeist* is its vulnerability. It is not only those living in poverty and misery or the underprivileged who are vulnerable; the value systems on which humanity's global coexistence is based are also vulnerable. Human rights, state sovereignty, morals, health, and educational systems are all vulnerable to destruction in a post-truth context. In an unprecedented way, humanity is exposed to the growing temptation to renounce universal values and norms and to place itself at the mercy of particular interests, which means an exponential increase in injustice and arbitrariness.

While social debates and political clashes in Central Europe are taking place around national interests, oligarchies, and the burdensome legacy of the past, the Christian church, and especially the local representatives of the Universal Catholic Church, have a special responsibility to remind people of the wider challenges. In the three decades following the change of regime, we have rarely witnessed the active involvement of the churches in social debates on issues of creation, global justice, and security. Official statements by local

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[10] *Letter in La Rebublica*, September 4, 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130911_eugenio-scalfari.html.

churches still hardly go beyond nationalist agendas. There are many efforts in the areas of pastoral care among the poor and those in crisis. What is experienced and done in these areas of pastoral care should move from the categorical to the central level. Churches should be able to be present not only among the sick and the imprisoned in a purgative and consoling way, and for those who belong to the nones, but also to the whole of society.

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Appealing Spirituality: Spiritual Centers in Search for Addressing Seekers

Adéla Muchová

This text examines how Christian spiritual centers are responding to a recent shift from institutionalized religion to personal spirituality.[1] Building on Tomáš Halík's claim that the future of churches depends on their ability to understand this "afternoon of Christianity" symptom and respond to it adequately, this study explores Christian spiritual initiatives, their appeal for spiritual seekers, and their possible relevance for further church ministry.[2] Throughout this work, I refer specifically to two European regions with a decline in church membership on the one hand, and a considerable number of spiritual seekers on the other, namely, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands.[3] A phenomenon of spiritual centers with a Christian background is more or less present in both countries and, as research shows, they serve a specific target group: seekers recruited from Christian environments. Therefore, this study asks first about the appeal of these centers for a secular public, and second, what this alternative pastoral approach means for established churches and their future ministry.[4]

By situating this study within practical theology, I follow its disciplinary framework: first, I examine four Czech spiritual centers and their appeal to the public; second, I review sociological and theological approaches to contemporary spiritual practices; and third, I discuss existing regional results and outline possible directions for future church ministry. Conceptually, I justify using particular terminology in respective areas of the text.

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[1] Robert Wuthnow, "Spirituality and Spiritual Practice," in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard K. Fenn (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 306-307.

[2] Tomáš Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství: Odvaha k proměně*, (Praha: NLN, 2021), 185; Tomáš Halík, "Religion and Individual Personal Fulfillment," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, eds. Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (Washington DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), 38.

[3] David Václavík, Dana Hamplová, and Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society," *Central European Journal for Contemporary Religion* 2, no. 2 (2018): 112; Kees de Groot, *The Liquidation of the Church* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2018), 96.

[4] Although the main representation is the Catholic Church, I refer to the church or churches in general to emphasize the universal character of mainstream church communities, unless stated otherwise.

Spiritual Centers

With a significant decline of territorial ministry in urban spaces, alternative Christian spiritual centers are emerging to provide their services. Although they vary in size, offer, organization, and spiritual tradition, they are becoming an important player in pastoral ministry especially due to their accessibility and universality. Some are initiated by influential church figures, others by spiritual teachers or religious orders. Some have evolved through time from lay communities and ecclesial movements while some function as retreat havens for individual stays. Still others are designed to welcome groups for courses and spiritual retreats. Both believers and un-churched people find these projects attractive especially because of their accessible character, be it spiritual exercises, contemplative practice, or spiritual direction.

The situation differs throughout European regions. A visible difference is observed between Western and Eastern Europe, for instance. In Western Europe, the counterculture of the 1960s accelerated secularization processes – a paradigm shift brought about a turn from the religious to the spiritual.[5] Once people accepted their interior life as open to options and not as a fixed cultural identity, they started to explore new ways of fulfilling their spiritual needs. The practice of meditation, for example, was reintroduced both through Christian and non-Christian traditions, such as Zen Buddhism and Hinduism, and appealed to many people. In response, new spiritual centers, among other things, emerged offering somewhat updated forms of spiritual practice.[6] Today, many of these are connected to contemporary movements, such as The World Community for Christian Meditation by John Main and The Contemplative Outreach by Thomas Keating in English speaking countries, and meditation movements inspired by Jesuits Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, Anthony de Mello, and Franz Jalics in Continental Europe. Although in Eastern Europe some contemplative practices, such as Taizé prayer, were practiced during communism and constituted a vital and attractive alternative to a state-controlled church, it was the arrival of democracy in the 1990s that enabled meditation movements to gain wider attention in this region.

Today, certain differences in development can be observed throughout European regions. In Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, for example, many Christian spiritual centers and retreat houses – both contemplative and others – have existed since the 1960s. Even though some struggle with reception from conservative Catholicism, many have since become established and

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[5] Halík, "Religion and Individual Personal Fulfillment," 36-37.

[6] Hellemans and Jonkers refer to a "non-parish" offer coming from "the second pillar of the Catholic Church;" classical religious orders are opening their space and adapting their programs to wider audience. See Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers, "Reforming the Catholic Church Beyond Vatican II," in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, 58.

recognized centers of contemplative life in many churches.[7] In the Netherlands, for instance, cultural anthropologist Peter Versteeg examined how Christian spiritual centers act as providers of Christian spirituality.[8] Pastoral psychologist Anke Bisschops noticed that Dutch spiritual centers claim to address "unbound spiritual seekers." By doing so, she showed a high level of interest in alternative spirituality especially among church affiliated people.[9] Most recently, practical theologian Kees de Groot and his team described a principal aim of these centers is to foster spiritual development and personal growth of individuals.[10] The focus on doctrine, rules, and obedience is decreased and, instead, personal growth, personal experience, authenticity, autonomy, and individuality are emphasized. The spiritual offer is adapted to the demand, and we see influences from outside Christianity, such as psychology and Eastern religious traditions like various meditation and Zen practices, physical exercises, yoga, chanting, enneagram, etc. In communicating their message, these centers use rather inclusive language, rarely referring to any church terminology.[11]

In Eastern Europe, this phenomenon is rather recent. Churches operate *de facto* on territorial structure, and independent spiritual centers – responding to religious pluralism and spiritual diversity – emerge only gradually. Therefore, the following section will focus on four Czech cases. Despite being rooted in the Christian tradition, all four demonstrate a certain independence from existing church structures.

Case Studies

Tomáš Halík often promotes contemplative spirituality in his theology and pastoral ministry, most recently in *Odpoledne křesťanství*.[12] When Halík speaks of the rising interest in spirituality in the Czech Republic, I argue that he is actually referring to four particular initiatives, which he either initiated or promoted and publicly supported. Four spiritual centers, *Salvátor*, *Kolín*, *Noe*, and *Fortna,* were therefore identified for this study. The choice was

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[7] In July 2022, for instance, 272 different retreat houses and 237 spiritual courses for the period between July 2022 and January 2023 were listed on the collective website; Exerzitien: Deutschland, Österreich, Südtirol, https://www.exerzitien.info/index.php/haeuser (accessed July 27, 2022).

[8] Peter Versteeg, "Spirituality on the Margin of the Church: Christian Spiritual Centres in the Netherlands," in *A Sociology of Spirituality*, eds. Peter C. Jupp and Kieran Flanagan (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 101.

[9] Out of 51 examined centers, 34 were Catholic, 10 Protestant, and 8 ecumenical; Anke Bisschops, "The New Spirituality and Religious Transformation in the Netherlands," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19, no. 1 (2015): 33-34.

[10] Groot, *Liquidation of the Church*, 103.

[11] Anke Bisschops, "The New Spirituality and Religious Transformation in the Netherlands," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19, no. 1 (2015): 33-39.

[12] Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 189-191.

based on Halík´s portrayal of alternative ministry as the promotion of a Christian contemplative lifestyle.[13] All empirical data was collected during Summer 2022 from open sources, official website presentations, social media, newsletters, and indirect observation.

Salvátor – The Academic Parish of Prague

The Academic Parish of Prague centers around the St. Salvátor Church. It is structurally organized as a Catholic parish; however, it also functions as a university chaplaincy available to a wide public.[14] Halík has been serving the congregation as parish priest for thirty years. Although many particular activities have changed over the decades, the emphasis on education, critical thinking, and contemplative spiritual life have not only persisted but have been strengthened in the last decade. This can be attributed both to Halík and his pastoral team members, who were recruited from Halík's former students. Their interest in meditative practice eventually facilitated an establishment of an independent retreat house, the Kolín Convent. The parish is known for a high number of adult converts from the general public; therefore, most pastoral activities actually focus on spiritual seekers, as Halík puts it. Being aware of its appeal, the parish emphasizes its openness to dialogue with little intervention into people's private lives. Individual spirituality is treated as a rather intimate issue. The parish claims to provide visitors with a religious inspiration of high quality without being ecclesiastically demanding.[15]

Kolín – The Kolín Convent

The Kolín Convent: A Centre for Spirituality and Retreat started as a non-profit organization when the Jesuits decided to withdraw from running a retreat house in 2019.[16] Today, the supervisory boards ensure both its ideological and economic function, as guaranteed by the registered statutes. The community around Kolín consists of active Christians, lay men and women, who participated in and were trained from previous activities of the house when it was a Jesuit retreat center. Its character is therefore closely connected to contemporary Jesuit and Carmelite retreat practice, either through Ignatian exercises of various kinds, or through the meditation schools of Franz Jalics, Enomiya-Lassale, and Jan Šedivý.

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[13] Adela Muchová, "Pastoral Practice of the Academic Parish of Prague," *Studia UBB Theol. Cath. Lat.* LXVI, no. 1 (2021): 88-89.

[14] Akademická farnost Praha, https://www.farnostsalvator.cz/ (accessed July 21, 2022).

[15] Muchová, "Pastoral Practice," 88-89.

[16] Kolínský klášter, https://www.kolinskyklaster.org/ (accessed July 21, 2022).

Noe – The Noe Community

The Noe Community resides in a small village of Holostřevy and dates its roots back to the 1980s as a community of young Christians in the West Bohemian region.[17] Since 1998, members of this community have been in charge of a parish house and the surrounding property. The community manager is a Catholic deacon who lives in the house with his family and serves both a few locals and many people from the region. Having originated in the charismatic movement, the group has evolved into a more pluralist and open community today with a contemplative approach and experience, following the meditation school of Jan Šedivý. Besides providing basic religious service in the parish, its strength lies in the enhancement of the culturally exploited region during communism, political activism, and spiritual enrichment. Socializing and networking belong to its main methods of work.

Fortna – The Convent of Discalced Carmelites

The *Fortna* initiative resides in a convent of Discalced Carmelite monks. The property was taken over from Carmelite nuns in 2019 and soon after opened to the public.[18] The project was initiated by the Carmelite community; however, the team today includes several employees and volunteers who carry out the mission of the house, offering spiritual and educational programs. The facility and position of the house allows for various activities ranging from a few hours to a few days. A synthesis of spirituality, psychology, and art, and a reference to authors such as Richard Rohr and John Main, are characteristic of various talks, retreats, and workshops at Fortna.

The four centers have different affiliations to a particular church or diocese, as do the properties they use for their work. Salvátor serves in a prominent baroque church at the foot of the Charles Bridge; Kolín uses a Capuchin convent and former Jesuit house in Kolín; Noe has an old parish house property in a remote village of Holostřevy; and Fortna has a Carmelite convent at the prestigious Prague Castle. In sum, they all operate on church estates which have served various missions in history and remain in the possession of the diocese (Salvátor), religious orders (Fortna, Kolín), or the community (Noe). Three of the centers reside in the Archdiocese of Prague, and one in the neighboring Diocese of Pilsen. Structurally, two of them operate on a semi-parochial and chaplaincy system (Salvátor, Noe), one is affiliated to a religious order (Fortna), and one is registered as a non-profit organization without a structural relation to the church (Kolín). While two have been around for almost three decades (Salvátor, Noe), one was transformed from

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[17] Komunita Noe, http://komunitanoe.cz/ (accessed July 22, 2022).
[18] Fortna, https://www.fortna.eu/ (accessed July 22, 2022).

a previous retreat house several years ago (Kolín), and one started during the recent pandemic (Fortna).

The examined initiatives originated in Catholic communities and, as such, they are still a unique phenomenon in the Czech church; they exist alongside more traditional retreat centers run by dioceses or religious orders.[19] While their specific – and common – constituent is their support and practice of contemplative spirituality, their approval from church hierarchy and from churches in general varies from being welcomed, to being doubted, or to being refused. All four centers claim to be addressing seekers, believers and nonbelievers, Christians and non-Christians. Their appeal seems to be in the manner they are living, formulating, and presenting Christian spirituality in accessible and pluralist ways, somewhat independent from church structures. Content analysis of communication strategies revealed major orientation, emphasis, and mission approaches of particular centers; both similarities and differences were observed. Four mission statements – as presented on respective websites – represent their initiatives through their main mottos and provide valuable material for a qualitative analysis. The choice of language, for instance, revealed a form of communication: it introduced the presenters in their preferred way, outlined who the potential addressees were, and provided a general idea of the project. Textual analysis – using a coding method – then identified major themes and directions of all the examined initiatives.

A noted characteristic is that some centers prefer to present their initiative as a community (of people, of faithful Christians), while others introduce it as a place instead. It can be a place for personal enrichment (growth, silence), for social realization (meeting and serving others), or for both (horizontal meeting vertical). Those that stress the community aspect present their initiatives by saying who they are (Christians, people feeling at home at a certain location), what they believe (in the Gospel, God, people, all of creation), and what they strive for on an individual level (deepening life of faith, experiencing personal and spiritual growth). Some disclose their methods (promoting ecumenism and interfaith, understanding spirituality as the meaning of life, using contemplation as an attitude of loving attention, offering spiritual and educational programs, providing space for stays), while some declare their mission (to be close to those who long for life values, to cultivate diversity, to seek connections with others, to be an open and inviting house).

To emphasize their accessibility, they identify their projects as open (community, house, public), close to seekers, and ready to share with others

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[19] In July 2022, for instance, the Jesuit website offered 25 spiritual exercises for a period between July 2022 and December 2022 at three different retreat houses (Velehrad, Hostýn, and Kostelní Vydří); Exercicie, http://www.exercicie.cz/nabid ka.php (accessed July 21, 2022). A diocesan retreat center Svatá Hora offered 12 courses for the same period; Svatá Hora, https://svata-hora.cz/farnost/exercicie-a-duchovni-cviceni/ (accessed July 27, 2022). All 37 promoted retreats are led by men, mostly priests; they are often lecture-based and offered to a specific target group, such as clergy, specific age or profession groups. A few spiritual retreats by ecclesial communities or religious orders, such as Vranov, are not included.

(co-create with us). While most initiatives combine self-presentation and their offer subtly (we are, our style is, we offer, with us), one center makes a demanding character clear to its potential participants (people who seek silence, want to make serious efforts to develop their spiritual life). Similarly, a tendency to diversity is expressed a few times (ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, diversity, what connects us as human beings). It is evident that each center chooses careful wording; it can be assumed that a team of people was involved in the final formulation for a public audience. The creativity of authors is clear even in these short statements: some texts are brief and descriptive; others use poetic expressions (consciously cultivates and encourages diversity, seeks and finds what connects as to each other, where the horizontal of matter and the vertical of spirit intersected for centuries). As for the use of explicitly religious language, there is one mention of God, the Gospel, and Christians; everything else seems spiritually universal as if intended for a general and nonreligious audience. The only initiative that speaks explicitly of contemplation, uses mindfulness language (attitude of loving attention).

Without exception, all four speak about spirituality (precious life values also translated as spiritual and personal values, spiritual life, spiritual growth, spiritual program), and one refers to a spirit (the vertical of spirit). Interestingly, none mentions religion, church, or Catholicism but keeps strictly to non-specific language. Although one initiative carries an explicit ecclesial title (the Roman-Catholic parish) and all refer to their Christian roots at some point, none of them uses delineating language against others, religiously or socially.

The analysis showed how these spiritual centers communicate their existence and offer to the general public. It revealed their attempt for a universal approach without a normative or judgmental claim; quite the opposite, the programs aim at those who are not satisfied with standard forms of religious offer, such as traditional or cultural religiosity. By presenting their characteristics, missions, and methods with respect to others, they demonstrate their understanding of spirituality as a broad and inclusive existential quest. A careful choice of language, for example, showed a knowledgeable approach: if they wish to address seekers and nones without renouncing their Christian heritage, their communication needs to be adapted for everyone. The question is whether this is a natural way of communication – perhaps through numerous contacts outside Christianity – or a skilled strategy to attract seekers. Answering this question could, for instance, prove or disapprove their credibility in a potential dialogue with the nones.

Examining Christian Spirituality

A shift from religion to spirituality has been described. People are distancing themselves from institutional forms of religion and seeking alterna-

tive transcending options.[20] Spirituality today serves as an umbrella term for various internal and more or less transcendent experiences and practices throughout the world, cultures, and religions. It is often unclear what particular groups are embracing when they speak of spirituality, so a linguistic and semantic interpretation is necessary for further discussion.[21] Speaking of Christian spirituality, theology emphasizes, above all, a human response to God's initiative: "the conscious and methodical development of faith, hope and love" (Rahner), "the realization of faith in the concrete conditions of life" (Zulehner)," "the lived basic attitude of man's devotion to God and his cause" (Greshake), "the process in which the revelation affects the whole existence of a person: live from the fullness of what has been given to us through salvation" (Sudbrack), and the involvement of both theological and anthropological dimensions: "on the side of God it is the Holy Spirit given to people, on the side of human spirituality is letting oneself be touched by the attention of God, through which life is transformed" (Wiesmyer).[22]

Christian spirituality is a particular form of nurturing relation between oneself and God after having experienced God's love, i.e., personal salvation. Due to its intimate character, it is a delicate theme for theology and pastoral practice. Without a personal conversion – accepting human limitations and God's healing intervention – certain spiritual techniques and practices can be performed technically well but may not be authentic, credible, and effective for the person and the community. Acknowledging the relational character of personal spirituality (between God and humans) is essential for a Christian understanding of faith; it is not individualistic and separated from others. Quite to the contrary, it leads to strengthening relations within a community.

It is important to study present forms of practicing spirituality, such as popular Christian centers, which provide – conceptually and technically – space for such a shared spiritual experience. While a recent distinction between religion and spirituality (spiritual but not religious) often carries a negative connotation towards established religion,[23] spirituality has always been a part of church history under different expressions. The language has differed throughout time and depending on the denominational tradition: Protestants preferred to speak of piety and Scripture reading; Anglicans spoke

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[20] Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead, Benjamin Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski, and Karin Tusting, eds., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 1-11.

[21] The original Latin word *spiritualis*, a Christian neologism, was historically used as an adjective not a substantivum; Christoph Benke, "Was ist (christliche) Spiritualität? Begriffsdefinitionen und theoretische Grundlagen," in *Spiritualität – mehr als ein Megatrend*, ed. Paul M. Zulehner (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2004), 31.

[22] Regina Polak, *Religion kehrt wieder: Handlungsoptionen in Kirche und Gesellschaft* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2006), 201.

[23] Wuthnow, "Spirituality and Spiritual Praxis," 306-307.

of devotion, inner life, and a life of perfection; and Catholic authors talked about mysticism and contemplation.[24]

Christian spirituality is certainly an interdisciplinary field. While Stefan Huber proposes a three-dimensional interdisciplinary model using sociology, psychology, theology, and religious studies, Elisabeth Hense argues other disciplines should be included, such as health care, education, humanities, arts, management.[25] Moreover, David Lonsdale justifies a role of spirituality within a church context.[26] The field is boundless, touching virtually all spheres of human existence. This study, examining spiritual centers, is limited to contemporary Christian spirituality and, by doing so, it refers to Christian theology, tradition, and language. Methodically, it builds on Sandra M. Schneiders's anthropological disciplinary approach,[27] which employs a hermeneutical methodology and enables interpretation of this postmodern phenomenon.

Exploring Spiritual Practices

Sociology of religion has contributed to the study of spiritual practices outside theology. Robert Wuthnow emphasizes a recent shift in human understanding and applying our knowledge. For most of history, understanding and knowledge were passed on through narratives, which provided navigation through life. This was later substituted with science and intellectual systems, which contributed to rational processes on social behavior. It did not, however, result in a practical understanding of everyday life, thus people return to various spiritual practices to find orientation in life.[28] Wuthnow describes this as a *practice turn* in the social sciences marked by a shift from classification concepts to structuring processes.[29] Steensland et al. observe a shift from

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[24] Sandra M. Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 22-23. Similarly, Benke observes a novelty of the term in the German language; prior to the 1950s, the following were used instead of spirituality: ascetics, mysticism, piety, perfection, and call to holiness, Benke, "Was ist (christliche) Spiritualität?," 31-32. Polak notes it was Vatican II that rehabilitated the term by emphasizing the universality of spiritual life for everyone – a call to holiness. By doing so, it actually acknowledged a variety of different spiritualities, Polak, *Religion kehrt wieder*, 199.

[25] Elisabeth Hense, "Current Forms of Christian Spirituality," in *Present-Day Spiritualities: Contrasts and Overlaps*, eds. Elisabeth Hense, Frans Jespers, and Peter Nissen (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 11-13.

[26] David Lonsdale, "The Church as Context for Spirituality," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, 239.

[27] Schneiders, "Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality," 26-28.

[28] Wuthnow, "Spirituality and Spiritual Praxis," 313.

[29] Robert Wuthnow, *What Happens When We Practice Religion? Textures of Devotion in Everyday Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 3.

orthodoxy (right belief) to *orthopraxy* (right practice) and emphasize that the role of practice in spirituality is more important than it is for religion. As sociologists, they argue that studying spiritual practices in everyday life should focus on their collective, embodied, discursive, empowering, and pragmatic dimensions.[30]

Wuthnow proposes a functional classification: devotional practices, practices aimed at enriching one's spiritual life, practices aimed at expressing spirituality, and practices that derive from a person's relationship to the sacred.[31] The vocabulary may differ in respective fields of study – theology, sociology, psychology, religious studies, etc. – but Wutnow's classification can facilitate a discourse across the field knowledge, pastoral experience, or denominational affiliation. Practical theologian Claire Wolfteich notes that although many seek spirituality outside churches, Christianity has extensive resources. Critical study and creative adaptation are, therefore, some of the important tasks for practical theology today. Referring to John Cassian and desert spirituality, Wolfteich observes that practices are integral to spirituality, yet they are something more than an application of faith. While building on traditional forms, such as prayer, Bible study, lectio divina, liturgy, spiritual direction, and charity, these can be expanded with community, labor, rest, and hospitality as suggested by classical authors.[32] For pastoral theologians and church ministers, it is thus essential to study contemporary forms of spiritual practices, which are rooted in classical traditions, such as Benedictine, Carmelite, or Jesuit, and, at the same time, accessible to seekers and nones who have no prior Christian knowledge. They should identify what forms of spirituality are sought by people and if and how traditional forms can be adapted to fit the needs of people today. The fear of value relativism, for instance, cannot prevent churches from being creative and open to seekers coming from various spiritual backgrounds.

The increasing quest for personal spirituality has been accelerated by urbanization and globalization. The urban lifestyle is no longer conditioned by culture, family, and social contexts; the religious and nonreligious alike can explore suitable forms of internal and transcendental practice. Benefits of urban settings, such as accessibility, mobility, experience, education, and cultural loosening, enable people to opt for their faith and religious affiliation

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[30] Brian Steensland, Jaime Kucinskas, and Anna Sun, "Eminently Social Spirituality: Context, Practice, and Power," in *Situating Spirituality: Context, Practice, and Power*, eds. Brian Steensland, Jaime Kucinskas, and Anna Sun (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 15-17.

[31] Wuthnow, "Spirituality and Spiritual Praxis," 313-314. Riesebrodt, for instance, identifies three types of religious practices as interventionist (establishing contact with superhuman powers), discursive (interpersonal communication), and behavior-regulating (reshaping of everyday life); Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 75-77.

[32] Claire E. Wolfteich, "Spirituality and Social Sciences," in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (London: SCM Press, 2005), 329-334.

or stay outside recognized religions. In the context of urban spirituality, Michael S. Northcott remarks on two rising phenomena: the charismatic and the contemplative movements.[33] Although the two groups are rather different in their emphasis and theological approaches, they share a key emphasis on exercising authentic and committed spirituality. In the Catholic context, this is often connected with fidelity to church teaching; nevertheless, both groups show some degree of independence from church hierarchy as well as representation of lay men and women in leading positions. Valerie Lesniak understands the appeal of contemplative practices and themes, such as transformation, solitude, interiority, the search for wisdom, contemplative prayer, and spiritual growth, as a counterbalance to today's complex societies and lives. The resources of other religious traditions are appealing and accessible to the public today. For example, a large body of literature on prayer and Eastern meditation is published, and the practices of yoga, tai chi, chanting, drumming, walking the labyrinth, and ritual practices from indigenous cultures are adopted by churches and spiritual centers. She argues that their popularity contributes to a dislodging of these practices from particular theologies.[34]

When Halík speaks of a rising interest in spirituality, I argue that his main pastoral concern is contemplative practice. He has been a vocal promoter of contemplative spirituality, having held a reserved attitude towards the charismatic movement. While he repeatedly stresses the importance of an interior approach and silence, such as meditation, contemplation, and reading, he opposes an external and emotional style, such as Christian popular music. Although he has been responsible for a university chaplaincy for almost three decades, charismatic worship, for instance, is not represented in his congregation. Though Halík occasionally makes critical remarks about the charismatic movement, he is not particularly concerned or confrontational about the issue. Instead of focusing on criticisms of the charismatic movement, he promotes contemplative practice through direct support of particular contemplative initiatives. The four Czech spiritual centers discussed above offer various spiritual contemplative practices and, as such, portray a specific spiritual phenomenon in the local religious scene.

Discussion

Having examined empirical results and the theoretical framework of Christian spirituality, I now ask: In what ways do spiritual centers appeal to seekers and nones today, and how is this to be interpreted pastorally? In order to review spiritual centers and their offerings – a social and religious phenomenon – I build on the five dimensions of spiritual practice derived from exist-

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[33]Michael S. Northcott, "Cities and Spirituality," in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 195-197.

[34] Valerie Lesniak, "Contemporary Spirituality," in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 9-10.

ing work in the field as proposed by Steensland, Kucinskas, and Sun mentioned earlier, namely, collective, embodied, discursive, empowering, and pragmatic dimensions, and examine their pastoral relevance.[35] I treat the collective and discursive dimensions together to explore their social characteristics. I analyze the embodied and empowering dimensions for their individual disposition. I keep the pragmatic dimension separated. To take this semi-deductive approach, I review my research together with three similar works on spiritual centers in the Netherlands: a qualitative study from Peter Versteeg,[36] a quantitative survey from Anke Bisschops,[37] and interdisciplinary research from Kees de Groot.[38] While their results provide a striking parallel to my research, I draw from their themes and interpretations of alternative spirituality in secular society.[39]

Collective and Discursive

Since the primary concept of church is community – the family of God – church authorities have always been cautious about individualistic and private forms of religiosity. Individualism, self-realization, and spiritual narcissism, therefore, are major criticisms against practicing alternative forms of Christian spirituality. Halík observes that churches have, for centuries, tried to suppress spontaneity, control belief, and oversee the morals of believers. However, spirituality, with its certain kind of interior dynamic, has allowed for the escape from this suppression and control.[40] My research disclosed that spiritual centers emphasize a communitarian dimension by presenting their initiatives as a form of community, and by offering their houses as places to experience growth and silence, for social and spiritual encounters, and for service to others. While their primary motivation seems connected to vertical realities, most activities are organized in horizontal settings.

Steensland argues that "even when people cultivate an authentic-feeling and individualized spiritual self, they do so through collective processes: they meditate with others at retreat centers, they read books, listen to lectures, and participate in discussions."[41] A form of community life constitutes a major

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[35] Steensland, "Eminently Social Spirituality," 15-17.

[36] Versteeg, "Spirituality on the Margin of the Church."

[37] Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation."

[38] Groot, *Liquidation of the Church*, 95-114.

[39] While Versteeg delivered a study from the perspective of cultural anthropology in 2007, Bisschops produced a pastoral theological study in 2015. As the spirituality scene evolves quickly in Western Europe, we may question what the Dutch results would be today. It is expected – with the aforementioned social progress difference – that the situation in the Netherlands of the past two decades and the situation in the Czech Republic today could be analyzed plausibly due to analogous tendencies toward liberalism and individualism.

[40] Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 187.

[41] Steensland, "Eminently Social Spirituality," 15.

difference from traditional parish ministry; it is optional, tentative, and membership is not required. For ministers trained in strengthening pastoral communities, this poses a challenge. How is it possible to build a beneficial community and refrain from undesired demands on people at the same time? How do responsibility, engagement, and solidarity, for instance, correlate with individualization tendencies? Versteeg notices a certain clash between some organizers and visitors in terms of commitment: while some centers tend to create a network (i.e., a community of faith), their visitors oppose it. In fact, Christian spiritual centers have a positive idea about individualism: "what is meaningful cannot be prescribed by the church or tradition; it is to be discovered by paying attention to what is inside the individual person." This liberating characteristic of Christian spirituality does not eliminate relations. The spiritual process is understood as both private and relational, starting with self-experience, experience of God, and experience of others.[42] At this moment, pastoral theology should ask: how can such self-experience facilitate a biblical commandment of love (Mt 22:37-40)?

It was, for instance, thought that unbound seekers interested in personal development would show spiritual narcissism, religious opportunism, and consumerism. Research shows, however, that these people engage in many social activities, such as human rights, the environment, and promotion of peace. Moreover, their value system is close to Christian and humanistic values, such as freedom, the sanctity of life, respect for others, and personal development. In addition, many simultaneously have a high level of commitment to their local church, which leads to the question of their alleged detachment.[43] Similarly, Kees de Groot observes that a social dimension is not lacking within modern spirituality but, rather, takes on a different form.[44] Klara Csiszar argues that the anthropological perspective, with emphasis on a meaning-oriented approach, leads to social and political responsibility and should therefore be promoted by church ministry.[45]

By adopting universal, general, pluralistic, and sensitive language, many centers show interest in people outside of churches; traditional categories such as believers and nonbelievers do not suffice any more.[46] Regina Polak traces scholarly attempts to identify this target group as "religious vagabonds" (Hempelmann), "pilgrims and converts" (Hervieu-Leger), "religionbastlers" (Baier), or "spiritual seekers" (Zulehner), terms she sees as negative and disrespectful.[47] Wuthnow's "seekers and dwellers" emphasize a difference between those who are unsettled and settled in a religious tradition. In order to highlight their independence from church structures, Bisschops uses

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[42] Versteeg, "Spirituality on the Margin of the Church," 105-106.
[43] Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation," 31-32, 37.
[44] Groot, *Liquidation of the Church,* 5-6.
[45] Klara A. Csiszar, "Missionarisch. Existenziell. Spirituell," *Diakonia* 53, no. 1 (2022): 17.
[46] Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 187.
[47] Polak, *Religion kehrt wieder*, 218-219.

"unbound spiritual seekers." They have a transcendent orientation but do not conform to doctrines; they focus on empathy, harmony, and intuition.[48] Most recently, the term "nones" refers to nonbelievers and non-affiliated and is finding its way into scientific circles.[49]

Regardless of the language used in scholarship, spiritual centers address their visitors in general terms. Their knowledge and experience lead them to emphasize spiritual motivation and interest rather than terminological classification. To align with contemporary practice, I use both "seekers," for actively searching individuals attending spiritual centers, and "nones," for the unbound and individuals who perhaps are not even seeking. Versteeg observes, for instance, that some visitors "see spiritual practices of various origins as part of their way of being Catholic."[50] In fact, spiritual centers aim at unbound seekers with their offer but they attract mainly discontented Christians.[51] What does this mean for the spiritual centers and for churches in general?

Previous research reveals the importance of language in spiritual communication. It shows that these spiritual centers use inclusive, non-denominational, non-theistic, and holistic language. Although most spiritual practices direct individual spiritual experience, these practices are communicated through spiritual narrative and sharing. Recognition and adoption of respectful language is important for further pastoral ministry in other areas too. Halík, for instance, emphasizes the re-emerging practice of spiritual guidance. This specific service – based on discursive form – could become a new service from church to society. Its setting is both individual (private talk) and communitarian (community framework). Spiritual guidance is not a mission for gaining new membership; rather, it is plausible Christianity that leaves its mental and institutional borders to "become all things to all" (1 Kor 9:22) and walks with seekers on their spiritual way.[52] It is more about respectful and mutually enriching listening than speaking: "Christians will have to learn the courage to follow Christ into unfamiliar territory [...]. Listen and question before they start to interpret the great biblical narrative or even break the bread of the shared feast."[53]

Embodied and Empowering

Contemporary spiritual practices are – as they always have been in the past – closely linked to the body, its needs, and its desires. Sacraments, for

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[48] Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation," 30.

[49] Pew Research Center, "Nones on the Rise," October 9, 2012, https://www.pew research.org/religion/2012/10/09/ nones-on-the-rise/ (accessed July 28, 2022).

[50] Versteeg, "Spirituality on the Margin of the Church," 106.

[51] Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation," 31-32, 37; Groot, *Liquidation of the Church*, 104-105.

[52] Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 191.

[53] Halík, "Religion and Individual Personal Fulfillment," 36.

instance, have always served as visible signs of God among people; they operate with both mystical and material instruments. Given that their appeal seems to be diminishing due to their overuse and separation from a contemporary lifestyle, people tend towards simple bodily expressions in which they discover new meanings for themselves. Steensland speaks about daily routines, dietary habits, modes of dress, gestures of kneeling, prostration, and tattoos, which are important practices for many people today.[54] Theologically speaking, it is Christ's incarnation (i.e., God's embodiment) that opposes dualism and reconciles body and spirit, not only historically but also today. Newly accepting this perspective may therefore enable Christians to understand the need for coherence between their physical and spiritual lives, which is expressed in the popularity of these practices.

Halík remarks that globalization has led to an enrichment of Western spirituality through the embracing of some methods from the East, such as meditation, yoga, and Zen. A rise of nonconformist, syncretistic, and New Age subculture gave church authorities a certain legitimacy in their criticism; however, it did not result in questioning the signs of the times adequately. Instead of exploring the needs of people and producing a more competent spiritual offer, churches have remained in opposition to these trends.[55] Versteeg's, Bisschops's, Groot's, and my research show that the use of the same bodily techniques, such as physical exercise, yoga, breathing, dancing, martial arts, drawing, etc., are sometimes adopted in their original form and language (such as mandala drawing and tai chi), while at other times they are contextualized within Christian practice (such as kneeling, bowing, and pilgrimages). Certain practices still provide space for creativity. It would make sense, for instance, to incorporate breathing – a fundamental process of life – into Christian practice, handled by mindfulness. A biblical call for living in the present moment often carries a moral appeal but does not engage a banal physical tool such as breathing. Theological interpretation could, for example, build on Hebraic "Ruah," translated as "breath" and "spirit." Meditative breathing could find numerous pastoral applications, from pastoral talks, to family counseling, to spiritual direction.

Spirituality and body are also related to gender and race, argues Steensland. Seeking one's physical, mental, and spiritual harmony, regardless of religious authorities and systems, enables people to recognize their existential identity, whether gender, racial, or cultural. Versteeg, Bisschops, and Groot refer to the average visitor of a spiritual center: usually female, with higher education, and past middle age.[56] While the overrepresentation of women in the centers corresponds to the usual makeup of church membership, the difference between standard Catholic ministry and the centers is

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[54] Steensland, "Eminently Social Spirituality," 15-16

[55] Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 190-191.

[56] Versteeg, "Spirituality on the Margin of the Church," 105; Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation," 34; Groot, *Liquidation of the Church*, 104-105.

evident in the significant number of women in leadership and spiritual service at the centers. In essence, the centers challenge clericalism and hierarchicalism by providing professional opportunities to people who are under-represented in mainstream church leadership, namely, lay men and women. Equality is recognized as a significant characteristic of these centers; they are often administered by diverse leadership. This raises a question for churches: how can they bring competent and credible lay men and women into mainstream ministry without rejecting a priestly role in sacramental ministry?

Moreover, some centers demonstrate their spatial and physical accessibility through an "open house" policy, which emphasizes ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, diversity, and universal human values. Their trust in people, for example, takes a visible and original shape, such as in a recent project by Fortna where it opened a public club room with self-service drinks in the very center of Prague with thousands of daily passersby. Putting practical and symbolic trust in people, their needs, and choices, manifests a self-confident pastoral approach, which is not directed by obligations and control but by creative inspiration from civil society. On the one hand, the centers draw somewhat from a supply-demand model in creating their program offers; on the other hand, they do not camouflage their Christian agendas. To find and manage an effective balance between the two remains a great pastoral challenge. Spiritual centers assume and desire that people will demonstrate their interest in a particular spiritual offer by personal choice, not by an imposed rule. In comparison to local parish ministry, urban spiritual centers benefit from their non-binding character and instant feedback. They can repeatedly review their offers and flexibly respond to the signs of the times.

Steensland views spiritual practices as having an empowering capacity where individuals experience divine power; practices can provide a sense of control in uncertain times.[57] Pope Francis believes in the Church as a field hospital.[58] Polak and Zulehner see spirituality as a space for the healing of people.[59] Polak argues that physical and emotional well-being is the focus in a spiritual search: "while some seek autonomy, recognition and success, and control over one's life, others want to find their own self and become more self-confident."[60] The healing character of spiritual practices is examined scientifically in psychology, neurology, and therapy methods. Biblically speaking, healing is Jesus' primary ministry to the public; his unceasing attention to the sick and wounded modeled the future *diakonia* of the church. Therefore, it is not only professional and psychological help that Christian spiritual centers can provide to secular society today. There is, above all, a

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[57] Steensland, "Eminently Social Spirituality," 16-17.

[58] Pope Francis, "Interview with Antonio Spadaro," *La Civilta Cattolica*, 2013.

[59] Regina Polak and Paul M. Zulehner, "Theologisch verantwortete Respiritualisierung: Zur spirituellen Erneuerung der christlichen Kirchen," in *Spiritualität – mehr als ein Megatrend*, ed. Paul M. Zulehner (Ostfil-dern: Schwabenverlag, 2004), 209-210.

[60] Polak, *Religion kehrt wieder*, 218-219.

potential in cultivating modern spirituality, which would build on relevant traditions, contemporary knowledge, and genuine needs of people. This is a spirituality that values an intimate relation between God and humans so much that it refrains from moral judgment and doctrinal claims. It is a spirituality that is not afraid to receive inspiration from non-Christian practices.

A question of emancipating spirituality from church structures is also raised by Halík. Given that churches have already renounced their dominance over art, science, economics, and politics, is it legitimate to acknowledge that spirituality can flourish outside of churches nowadays? What would this mean for churches and their very reason for existence? "Faith without deeds is dead […]. But faith without spirituality is dead too."[61] If spirituality can cope without churches, what would be the reason for churches without spirituality?

Pragmatic

In contrast to the seemingly transcendent character of spirituality, Steensland emphasizes that religious and spiritual practices are actually highly pragmatic; they are concerned with everyday goals and struggles and their solutions.[62] People perform certain spiritual practices for their own gratification, comfort, and meaning; but unlike established religious practices, they are carried on informally and on an irregular basis. In urban spaces, a spiritual offer is liberated from a socio-cultural demand, and people opt for their own mixture of practices, such as meditation and yoga, without denouncing their previous religious affiliation.

After analyzing her research, I note that Bisshops outlines motives for visiting spiritual centers. Participants reported seeking inspiration, getting closer to their own core, developing wisdom, reflecting on their own life, expanding consciousness, deepening their relationship with God, looking for peace and quiet, meeting kind souls, achieving balance between mind and body, and better accepting life as it comes. She emphasizes the subjective and individualistic character of these expectations: people are interested in personal growth and personal experience; they are individualistic and show a "turn to subjective." At the same time, visitors enjoy a certain degree of socializing – meeting like-minded individuals (kind souls, connection) does not dominate the survey, but it is somewhat represented. Bisschops observes, in contrast to expectations, that the majority of visitors are connected to traditional churches or local communities, which may explain the focus of spiritual centers on individuals rather than on a community.[63] Similarly, Versteeg notices that the centers operate with a definite market-orientation, i.e., being aware of the individualistic motives of their visitors. Moreover, the

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[61] Halík, *Odpoledne křesťanství*, 189.
[62] Steensland, "Eminently Social Spirituality," 16.
[63] Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation," 35-37.

centers tend towards a more liberal, ecumenical, and interfaith worldview, and visitors support progressive tendencies within the Catholic Church, which promote reform of authority and liturgy: "Spirituality and a progressive interpretation of Christian faith have some things in common, as both strive to liberate people from oppressive structures."[64]

For many people, we may argue that visiting alternative spiritual centers is a pragmatic option to harmonize one's faith and worldview without the need to fight against rigid church structures. Interestingly, when people take active responsibility for their spiritual lives, they do not hesitate to take social action too. Versteeg describes a particular center that treats the Catholic tradition as a resource and inspiration, better than as a doctrinal body. In harmony with its Franciscan heritage, however, it refuses esoteric worldviews which would reject the reality of suffering and poverty. Its approach is close to pastoral and social action, i.e., presence with people in need. Similarly, I noticed humanitarian help being provided by one of the Czech centers to recent Ukrainian refugees. The house accommodated and provided for several dozens of women and children while striving to continue with their spiritual program for three months. Dozens of volunteers ensured non-stop service for people in need, and their explanation was simple, pragmatic, and charitable all at the same time: it was just needed.

Once again, the centers accentuate a theme of trust, a rather significant phenomenon in pastoral settings as this challenges churches to rebuild trust in people. Instead of providing spiritual care as a completed, well-packaged product, churches could broaden their horizons in the spiritual field and accept the fact that people are capable of finding their spirituality, which is authentic and creative and leads to growth and service to others. Such trust will be beneficial for both sides. People entrusted with freedom will grow in personal and spiritual maturity, and churches will be endowed with self-confident members with a social responsibility. In church organizations, a certain discernment of spiritual practices is necessary to avoid chaos and relativism. Verifying the biblical fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, and faithfulness (Gal 5:22) – might be a reliable tool to apply to a "new spirituality."[65]

Conclusion

Having examined contemporary Christian spiritual centers and their visitors, this study disclosed several themes for future pastoral ministry. It

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[64] Versteeg, "Spirituality on the Margin of the Church," 104. In this context, Bisschops poses a crucial question about the extent of discontent among Christians who do not visit these centers. Do they, for instance, nurture their faith and worldview outside established church structures? Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation," 38.

[65] Groot, *Liquidation of the Church*, 99-100.

revealed, above all, a different target group than expected. Although spiritual centers appeared to be targeting seekers and nones, they are, in fact, attracting discontented seekers with a Christian background. Beyond simply reaching out to the secular public and attracting nones, Christian spiritual centers, I conclude, are challenging the current state of churches and their spiritual offers. They are successful in addressing people with Christian experience and values who are looking for spiritual gratification compatible with their religious heritage but who disagree with hierarchical, clerical, and authoritative church structures.

The centers do not actually offer a new spirituality as much as they offer an alternative to current shapes of religious practice by adapting their offer to the needs of people today. What people need is to search for autonomy, freedom, authenticity, and personal growth. In this sense, the centers can serve as a prophetic example for the church of the future. If churches, whose attendance and membership numbers are decreasing in plural societies, wish to address people in a relevant way, they may receive inspiration in their know-how and pastoral models. The potential changes concern systematic, theological, and structural areas. If spiritual centers are understood as prophetic signals, they could be the model of the modernization of church communities – and by doing so, justify their existence even in a secular society.

A systematic change is necessary in urban areas as people face diversity and choice. In order to envision this future, Hellemans and Jonkers argue that the religious offer needs a profound systematic and methodic change, including changes in personnel and attitudes towards individualism. "It also implies that the church will have to accept that people will make a singular choice in the offer, tailored to their own preferences, and that they will mingle elements from different religions and spiritualities."[66] Adaptation to individualism and respect of individual freedom, proposes Bisschops, is how churches can find their role in postmodern society today.[67] This is more profound than a mere change of communication strategies. It has to do with a theological, anthropological perspective on human dignity and responsibility. It means accompanying seekers in dialogue, mutual respect, and enrichment, argues Halík, "to take the path of sharing experiences and charisms without proselytism"[68] and "to stop completely to judge the lifestyle of individuals from the perspective of traditional morality."[69] A structural change from territorial to alternative ministry is therefore necessary. Deliberate support of optional forms of ministry, such as chaplaincies, spiritual centers, spiritual guidance, as well as competent clerical and lay professionals, would ensure credibility and relevance in a post-pandemic world where churchgoing – the most typical practice so far – has been fundamentally challenged.

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[66] Hellemans and Jonkers, "Reforming the Catholic Church," 65-66.
[67] Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation," 39.
[68] Halík, "Religion and Individual Personal Fulfillment," 36.
[69] Bisschops, "New Spirituality and Religious Transformation," 39.

Lastly, a question arises regarding the future existence of these spiritual centers. Once incorporated into renewed church structures, will these centers diminish with the decreasing number of Christian seekers, or will they adopt a more syncretic approach to address the increasing number of nones – humanists without a particular interest in the Christian tradition?

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Learning about Spirituality together with Seekers: Reading *Together Towards Life* in the Czech Post-Secular Context

Pavol Bargár

Exploring the Czech Religious Landscape

The Czech Republic has long been commonly considered to be one of the most atheistic countries in the world.[1] Indeed, a number of international comparative surveys indicate exceptionally low levels of religiosity, especially when compared with its neighbors in central Europe.[2] However, more recent sociological studies show that this widely held assumption about the purported Czech atheism does not correspond to the reality.[3] This assumption, so these studies show, does not take into consideration a high degree of privatization and individualization with respect to religiosity as well as a broadly spread distrust of traditional religious institutions, especially mainstream Christian churches. To understand this phenomenon, one must consider several political, social, and demographic developments that the Czech society underwent in the 20th century (some even suggest going back to the 19th or even 17th centuries),[4] while also paying attention to the important trends and transformations of Czech religiosity in the 21st century.[5] The formative period of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) was shaped by an increasing distrust of institutionalized religion, trends pointing toward

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[1] This paper originally appeared in *International Review of Mission* 108, no. 2 (November 2019): 326-336. Hereby republished by kind permission from John Wiley and Sons.

[2] See Dušan Lužný and Jolana Navrátilová, "Religion and Secularisation in the Czech Republic," *Czech Sociological Review* 9, no. 1 (2001): 85-98; Andrew M. Greeley, *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium: A Sociological Profile* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003); David Voas, "The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe," *European Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (2009): 155-68.

[3] See Dana Hamplová and Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Invisible Religion in a 'Non-believing' Country: The Case of the Czech Republic," *Social Compass* 56, no. 4 (2009): 581-597; Olga Nešporová and Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Religion: An Unsolved Problem for the Modern Czech Nation," *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 45, no. 6 (2009): 1215-1237; David Václavík, Dana Hamplová, and Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society," *Central European Journal of Contemporary Religion* 2, no. 2 (2018): 99-122.

[4] Václavík et al., "Religious Situation," 101. See also Cynthia J. Paces, "'The Czech Nation Must Be Catholic!': An Alternative Version of Czech Nationalism during the First Republic," *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 27, no. 3 (1999): 407-428.

[5] See Václavík et al., "Religious Situation," 108-111.

privatization of religious faith, and a growing disinterest and apathy vis-à-vis religion in everyday life. This development was reinforced in the wake of World War II due to the deportations of the Czechoslovak citizens of German nationality from the Czech borderlands in 1945-1947 and the establishment of communist rule in early 1948. Nevertheless, communist ideology championed by the state ultimately failed to make Czech society atheistic. To the contrary, religion, especially the Catholic Church, gradually became a significant symbol of dissent and hope in the 1970s and 1980s. Having said that, however, one needs to add that "everyday life was more and more enmeshed in consumerism and individualized materialism."[6] After the fall of communism in 1989 Czech religiosity in the Czech society has been shaped by the trends similar to those (especially) in the global West, such as the deinstitutionalization of religiosity, the emergence of spiritual market-place, and the burgeoning of privatized spirituality.

It is fair to say that recent research points out several significant features of the contemporary religious landscape in the Czech Republic.[7] First, most of the relevant survey data show that only a small minority of the Czech population are convinced atheists. Czech atheism tends to be identified with other religious phenomena, such as deinstitutionalized religiosity and apathy toward institutional religion. Second, the Czech religious life demonstrates a low level of institutionalization as even those who explicitly declare affiliation to a specific religious group fail to participate in religious life. Third, religion is a deeply individualized matter, which leads to an ambivalent attitude toward religious institutions, on the one hand, and to a high degree of religious syncretism, on the other. And fourth, Czech religiosity is characterized by a low level of commitment to religious convictions and religious values only play a minor role in everyday life. Therefore, we may safely conclude, with some sociologists of religion, that what is mistakenly taken for Czech atheism is, in fact, "individualized and privatized spirituality."[8]

"Meet Seekers!": From Religiosity toward Spirituality

At the original theological level, spirituality represents a part of religion, even perhaps its core or most fundamental dimension. Psychology of religion suggests a somewhat opposite perspective when it construes spirituality as a "basic human need, on which every religion is ultimately built."[9] As such, religion is perceived as a particular kind of a broader anthropological constant of spirituality. As a hermeneutic concept employed in religious studies and

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[6] Václavík et al., "Religious Situation," 103.

[7] The following points are adapted from Václavík et al., "Religious Situation," 112.

[8] Václavík et al., "Religious Situation," 101.

[9] Zuzana Marie Kostićová, "Religion, Spirituality, Worldviews, and Discourses: Revisiting the Term 'Spirituality' as Opposed to 'Religion'," *Central European Journal of Contemporary Religion* 2, no. 2 (2018): 85.

sociology of religion, spirituality has been introduced to the field especially by Paul Heelas.[10] The concept refers to "a deinstitutionalized form of religiosity, characterized by a strong tendency to syncretize and detraditionalize religious views. Its goal is individual development and consumption; religion is not a goal, but rather an instrument."[11] It is important to note, together with Zuzana Marie Kostićová, that in popular culture and the New Age milieu, spirituality and religiosity are often interpreted as value-charged concepts effectively embodying the opposition between good and bad, respectively. In this understanding, then, spirituality is identified with authenticity, integrity, creativity, freedom, and connectedness with the Real, while religiosity/religion embodies dogmatism, (external) authority, hierarchy, collectivism, and punishment: "Where religion limits, spirituality gives wings."[12] Reflective of some of these aspects, however, without falling into a trap of inadequate value judgments, is the definition of spirituality by Norichika Horie who formulates it as follows: "Spirituality refers to both belief in what cannot usually be perceived but it can be felt internally, and practices to feel it with the whole mind and body, accompanied more or less by attitudes of individualism or privatism, anti-authoritarianism, and selective assimilation of religious cultural resources."[13]

Later in this article, we will argue for an understanding of spirituality that differs from this sociological take on the subject. Now, however, we can say that the Czech Republic represents a specific, albeit admittedly unique, example of the broader phenomenon of a resurgence of spirituality around the world, including the Western societies. What is important to be noted at this point, however, is that this growing interest in spirituality often serves as a motivator and a driving force facilitating what has been labelled as "postsecular rapprochement."[14] This term refers to emerging spheres of social action that seek to overcome the gap in the public arena between the religious and the secular, involving "the intersections of multiple identities and axes of power."[15]

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[10] See Paul Heelas, *Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World: Spiritualities of Life. New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), especially 26.

[11] Václavík et al., "Religious Situation," 110, in reference to Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead et al., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

[12] See Kostićová, "Religion, Spirituality, Worldviews, and Discourses," 86.

[13] Norichika Horie, "Narrow New Age and Broad Spirituality," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, eds. Steven Sutcliffe and Ingvild Saelid Gilhus (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014), 111.

[14] See Paul Cloke, "Theo-Ethics and Radical Faith-Based Praxis in the Postsecular City," in *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban*, eds. Arie Molendijk, Justin Beaumont, and Christoph Jedan (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 223-241.

[15] See Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont, "Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement in the City," *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 1 (2012): 28. At the same

To better understand this new, post-secular condition, scholars suggest moving away from the traditional believers versus nonbelievers paradigm to a new dwellers and seekers paradigm.[16] Tomáš Halík argues that the latter paradigm can be usefully applied to the Czech situation as well as the situation of most of (especially western) European countries.[17] This paradigm not only posits that the so-called believers and nonbelievers cannot be viewed as two strictly separated groups but it also takes seriously the sociological fact that the numbers of both convinced atheists and dwellers are constantly decreasing.[18] In this framework, dwellers are those traditional believers who can fully identify with the church's (or another religious group's) doctrine and practice, while seekers refer to "those who are attracted by various kinds of new spiritual options such as westernized versions of Eastern religions or esoteric spirituality."[19] Halík's thesis is that the future of the church by and large depends on its ability to communicate with these seekers. In the spirit of the opening line of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the church should not only cry with those who are crying and rejoice with those who are rejoicing but also seek with those who are seeking.[20] Theologically speaking, the idea that the church needs to be present at today's Areopags to be in close relationship with people believing in an unknown God or just vaguely desiring for something beyond is crucial lest the church become an elitist sect.[21]

To describe this new situation that is of much missiological importance, two images are sometimes used. The first one is that of a field hospital, as suggested by Pope Francis in his 2015 homily at Casa Santa Marta.[22] The church, the Pope asserts, must be here to clean and heal wounds. It is not to comfortably stay in places that have traditionally been its safe spaces. Rather, it is incited to open itself to meet people in their various everyday contexts.

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time, however, Cloke and Beaumont are quick to add that their position is in no way meant to suggest the advent of "an epochal shift from a secular age" to one in which "the secular frameworks of public society have somehow been overthrown by a renewed set of religious influences" (29).

[16] Refer, for instance, to the *Faith in a Secular Age* project, pursued by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy and involving the thinkers such as Charles Taylor, Jose Casanova or George Mclean. See http://www.crvp.org/projects/team-2.htm (accessed April 10, 2019).

[17] Tomáš Halík, "Church for the Seekers," in *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, eds. Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 125.

[18] Halík, "Church for the Seekers."

[19] Halík, "Church for the Seekers."

[20] See Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), art. 1. Cited in Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, America Press and Association Press, 1966), 199-200.

[21] Halík, "Church for the Seekers," 129.

[22] See "Pope Francis' Homily: The Church Should Be Like a Field Hospital," https://www.romereports.com/en/2015/02/05/pope-francis-homily-the-church-should-be-like-a-field-hospital/ (accessed April 11, 2019).

This calling implies, *inter alia*, an open and welcoming attitude toward seekers. The second image is a biblical notion of kenosis that refers to the self-emptying of Jesus' own will in the process of incarnation with his will becoming receptive to God's own will. Similarly, Christians are called to adopt a kenotic approach to faith and life. They must not be afraid of becoming part of the people they live amongst, even when the religious identities of these people might be different, fragmented, multilayered or fluid.

Alan Jamieson's work might be of use to help us think about this issue further. Although he primarily explores the phenomenon of deconversion, that is, people leaving churches for various reasons, his observations are helpful for the purpose of this paper since one of the categories Jamieson describes includes people searching for a new religious place of belonging.[23] Jamieson introduces a useful distinction between marginal groups in opposition to liminal groups: "Whereas the marginal group is primarily focused on the past which they have left and is continuing to make sense of their leaving, the liminal group is primarily focused on what lies in the future. In faith terms it is looking to develop, build and nurture an ongoing faith."[24]

The concept of liminal group effectively brings together the emphases expressed by the opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes*, the field hospital metaphor, and the theological teaching on kenosis since it is construed as inherently connected to contemporary culture, asking the questions people are occupied with in their everyday lives and learning from the experience that emerge through their daily undertakings.[25] Moreover, the liminal group is characterized by its openness to people who think differently, something that the sources cited above call the church to pursue. Such an attitude, however, might often require willingness to think about being church in ways alternative to the ways of organized religion. And it certainly calls for a special type of spirituality. To this topic we are now going to turn our attention.

Spirituality through the Lenses of *Together Towards Life:* Minding Seekers

Taking the Czech situation as a case that has broader implications for other contemporary religious contexts, this paper seeks to move beyond the sociological observations and even the theological insights discussed above to pursue a missiological perspective on spirituality and seekers. Its main thesis is that the church in mission can fruitfully learn about spirituality together with seekers. To develop this thesis, the paper will turn to *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (TTL), the 2012 official affirmation by the World Council of Churches (WCC) on

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[23] See Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (London: SPCK, 2002), especially chapter 11.

[24] Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, 159.

[25] Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, 161.

mission and evangelism.[26] The argument will proceed in two steps, drawing from what TTL has to say on spirituality and what is called mission from the margins.

Introducing God's Spirit as the Breath of Life and the Spirit of Mission, one can certainly assert that spirituality lies, for TTL, at the heart of Christian mission. Particularly, the notion of transformative spirituality is key to the affirmation as a whole, discussed in a special sub-section.[27] For the purpose of this paper, it is crucial to note that TTL defines spirituality as something that "gives our lives their deepest meaning. It stimulates, motivates and gives dynamism to life's journey. It is energy for life in its fullness and calls for a commitment to resist all forces, powers, and systems which deny, destroy, and reduce life."[28]

The cited passage speaks about spirituality as energy for life in its fullness. That is a clear reference to a passage from John's Gospel that tells us about abundant life.[29] Though the concept of abundant life may have many connotations and ultimately evades any final definition, it represents, theologically speaking, an eschatological category that can perhaps be, with Teilhard de Chardin, alluded to as the Omega Point.[30] We experience life in abundance when righteousness, justice, peace, reconciliation, and love are reasserted in human lives, society, and the world. TTL itself suggests one possible interpretation when it states that to "experience life in the Spirit is to taste life in its fullness."[31] Writing the Spirit with the capital letter implies that the document has the Spirit of God in mind. However, with its accent on the fact that the Spirit of God can never be domesticated or tamed,[32] TTL at the same time makes it clear that spirituality is not merely a Christian domain or privilege: the Spirit invites to life in its fullness all people, even the whole creation.

This observation leads us to the second part of my argument. The following section of TTL elaborates an intriguing concept of mission from the margins, enabled by the Spirit of God as the Spirit of liberation.[33] It is a concept that urges one to understand "the complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities" and "to counteract injustices in life, church, and mission."[34] This concept has first and fore-

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[26] See World Council of Churches, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes – with a Practical Guide*, ed. Jooseop Keum (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013). Hereafter referred to as TTL.

[27] TTL, art. 29-35.

[28] TTL, art. 29.

[29] "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10; NRSV).

[30] See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper Collins, 2002). The book was originally published in French in 1955, after de Chardin's death.

[31] TTL, art. 34.

[32] TTL, art. 35.

[33] See, especially, TTL, art. 36-42.

[34] See TTL, art. 37 and 38, respectively.

most been construed to address the reality referred to as structural sin, that is, false presuppositions and beliefs that view certain groups of people as inferior, unclean, and primitive, while others as superior, clean, and civilized, thus inflicting "injustice and misery on many people."[35] Even though the notion of both margins and mission from the margins had been met with a certain amount of criticism, it was in the end included in TTL and remains to be widely used in WCC circles as, for example, the recent Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, showed.[36] The concept of mission from the margins emphasizes the evangelizing potential of the poor.[37] Furthermore, for many groups it is "a preferred expression of their reality," enabling them to communicate prophetic challenges that could otherwise "be thought of as marginal."[38]

Even though commonly interpreted through the geopolitical and/or socioeconomic hermeneutic lenses, and rightly so, as we have just seen, I would like to argue that the notion of mission from the margins can also be helpfully applied to reflect on the issue of religious belonging, in our case particularly the phenomenon of seekers. To be sure, seekers can legitimately be perceived as living on the margins with respect to the churches. And this situation undoubtedly involves power dynamics as seekers may be and often are excluded from religious life by their unfamiliarity with church discourse and inaccessibility to decision-making. On the other hand, their marginal situation is also to be viewed as one of epistemological importance because the case of seekers clearly shows, as I would like to suggest, that margins can become "places of knowledge, wisdom, creativity, and resistance," truly, "God's space."[39]

Furthermore, my understanding of seekers as being involved in mission from the margins draws from the TTL's premise that "mission from the margins invites the church to re-imagine mission as a vocation from God's Spirit who works for a world where the fullness of life is available for all."[40] The aim of the mission, then, as the document reminds us, is not simply to

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[35] See Wati Longchar, "Collective Resistance as Prophetic Witness: Mission from the Margin's Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 105, no. 2 (December 2016): 281.

[36] See *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/the-arusha-call-to-discipleship (accessed April 15, 2019). For an account of the process of drafting TTL, see Kirsteen Kim, "Mission after the Arusha Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, 2018," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (December 2018): 413-427, especially 421.

[37] See TTL, art. 36-54.

[38] Kim, "Mission after the Arusha Conference," 421.

[39] See Claudia Jahnel, "Mission in Creative (Un)Certainty: The Potential of the Interdependence of Mission from the Margins, the Agency of the Spirit in Mission, and Transforming Discipleship," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 2 (December 2018): 428-442, here 440.

[40] TTL, art. 37.

bring people on the margins to the center but rather to transform power structures by confronting those who have power through their encounter with those on the margins.[41]

Learning about Spirituality together with Seekers

If we maintain, as I suggest in this paper, that the church can learn (not only) about spirituality together with seekers, the question then is, what implications this approach might have for the church in mission. Based on my discussion so far, I would now like to briefly discuss several points. First, seekers as people on the margins of churches can provide Christians with fresh perspectives on faith matters as they are approaching religious doctrine and practice with new eyes. Theirs is a position of outsiders and the church could benefit from this great gift and opportunity. By way of analogy, this is also one of the main contributions of interreligious dialogue; one needs one's religious other to help one see things that have gradually become a matter-of-course in the eyes of dwellers.

Second, it is exactly this matter-of-courseness of religious business that seekers can help Christians questioning. Christianity grew out of the movement of Jesus' followers characterized by a rather low degree of institutionalization. To this very day the tension between institutionalized religion and movement in many respects remains at the heart of Christianity. Seekers are in a good position to bring new impulses to pursue this discussion constructively.

Third, the category of seekers gives the church a good opportunity to explore the human thirst for spirituality. As we have seen, TTL presents spirituality as something that cuts across religious and cultural borderlines, thus being in agreement with sociological surveys. This understanding is of much missiological importance as it points to an intriguing duality at the heart of spirituality: on the one hand, spirituality represents a special case of religion, perhaps even its core, and, on the other hand, it is a basic human need on which each religion is ultimately built.[42]

Fourth, coming usually from a nonreligious background, seekers can help Christians to acquire a new language to address religious, indeed, existential issues. Early Christian discourse was predominantly adapted from everyday usage, as historical and linguistic comparative studies of the New Testament show. For various reasons (including good ones), the language of Christian theology and practice has throughout history become very specialized, and thus alienated from everyday life in many respects. Dialogue with seekers can be one way of mending this missiological drawback.

Fifth, seekers can become an invaluable mirror in which the church can reflect on its faithfulness to its calling. Christians are thereby led to ask ques-

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[41] See TTL, art. 40.
[42] See Kostićová, "Religion, Spirituality, Worldviews, and Discourses," 85.

tions regarding the identity of the church as a community with a particular mission vis-à-vis the world. And these questions will not necessarily be pleasant ones. With respect to the Czech case, for example, they might want to ask themselves why churches enjoy such a low degree of trust in the Czech society.[43] Furthermore, they might want to ask, whether the church is willing to leave its comfort zones, go out, and be, to use Pope Francis' words again, a kind of field hospital, that is, be present in places where people suffer and need to be accompanied.[44]

This finally leads us, sixth, to envision cooperation between seekers and Christians in many dimensions of mission as many among those belonging to the two groups thirst for peace, justice, reconciliation, and charity. Numerous social justice, civic, educational, ecological or humanitarian initiatives provide evidence for this statement.

Conclusion

This paper has argued, drawing from TTL, that the Spirit of God cannot be appropriated by any (religious) group of people, including Christians. To the contrary, it is the Spirit of God that calls all people, regardless of their religious, ethnic, cultural, social or any other background to participate in God's mission in and with the world. God's mission of transforming the world can be joined by all those who share the vision of justice, peace, and life in its fullness for the whole creation. Spirituality thus commits people to counter all life-denying forces. Therefore, it is a highly demanding task that requires paying careful attention to what has theologically been referred to as the task of interpreting the signs of the times. One dimension of such interpretation lies in reassessing the church's relationship vis-à-vis spiritual seekers. Living on the margins of organized religion, yet deeply thirsting for spirituality, these people, it has been suggested, represent a great gift for the church thanks to their unique take on spirituality that can help Christians see both their identity and their calling in new light. In this sense, one can say that seekers can become a living embodiment of the insight that margins are, in words of the Arusha conference's Mission from the Margins Working Group, "grace-filled space" and "transforming places," sites of "holy disruption," and "the heart of the matter, where matters of the heart mean something."[45] Such encounter, engagement, and partnership between churches and

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[43] See Václavík et al., "Religious Situation," 107-108.

[44] See also Halík, "Church for the Seekers," 130.

[45] See Mission from the Margins Working Group, "Moving in the Spirit – Called to Transforming Discipleship: Theological Reflections from the Margins," in *Resource Book: Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship, 8-13 March 2018, Arusha, Tanzania*, ed. Jooseop Keum (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2018), 51. See also Jahnel, "Mission in Creative (Un)Certainty," 440.

spiritual seekers can be perceived in terms of "project identity."[46] Based on mutual trust and communal authority, the project identity regards identity-making as an ongoing process as the subject comes to know and shape their self in conversation with others, very often with the aim of collaborating on common endeavors. As such, seekers can become partners in God's mission of liberation, reconciliation, and transformation, despite their inability or unwillingness to identify themselves with the church as institution.

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[46] See Alan Jamieson, *Journeying in Faith: In and Beyond the Tough Places* (London: SPCK, 2004), 148. The concept of project identity itself was theorized by Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

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Christianity in the Secular Context of East Germany[1]

EBERHARD TIEFENSEE

Introduction

The Church today is confronted more by indifference and practical nonbelief than with atheism. Atheism is in recline throughout the world, but indifference and nonbelief develop in cultural milieus marked by secularism. […] To understand these phenomena, their causes, and consequences, to discern methods to resolve them with the grace of God, is doubtless one of the most important tasks for the Church today.

This insight stems from a paper, issued by the Vatican in 2004, with the revealing title, "Où est-il ton Dieu? La foi chrétienne au défi de l'indifférence religieuse" [Where is Your God? Christian Faith Challenged by Religious Indifference].[2] Although the paper's focus was not on East Germany, it described the situation in this region very accurately, as will be shown in section one. In line with the Vatican paper, the second section attempts to understand religious indifference, and section three will outline the practical consequences for the Christian church.

The Situation: Forced Secularization and the Nova Effect

The religious situation in the former GDR (German Democratic Republic) is the result of "forced secularization."[3] In less than two generations,

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[1] This paper is an extended version of Eberhard Tiefensee, "More than just de-Christianization: Christian mission in face of religious indifference in East Germany," in *The Decline of Established Christianity in the Western World. Interpretations and Responses*, ed. Paul S. Peterson (New York: Routledge, 2018), 129-144. Some passages are taken from Eberhard Tiefensee, "'Umänderung der Denkart': Mission angesichts forcierter Säkularität," in *Kirche in der Diaspora: Keynotes der "pastorale!" 2019 in Magdeburg*, ed. Tobias Kläden (Erfurt: Kamp, 2020), 11-25. The presentation on which this paper builds is available as a video on https://youtu.be/rvJHBLhC8PA and as text at https://kamp-erfurt.de/fileadmin/ user_upload/kamp_kompakt/Kirche_in_der_Diaspora_-_KAMP_kompakt_8.pdf (accessed August 15, 2022).

[2] An English translation of the original French version of this text, whose prominent author was Cardinal Paul Poupard, is available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_doc_20040313_where-is-your-god _en.html (accessed August 15, 2022). The quotation stems from the Introduction, sect. 2.

[3] Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, Uta Karsten, and Thomas Schmidt-Lux, eds., *Forcierte Säkularität: Religiöser Wandel und Generationendynamik im Osten Deutschlands* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus-Verlag, 2009).

the proportion of urban and rural unaffiliated increased from 5.5 percent in 1946 to 67 percent in 1990. Today, it is around 80 percent.[4] The sociologist of religion, Ehrhart Neubert, calls this a "maximum credible accident (MCA) of the church."[5] The term comes from the nuclear industry and means: "worst case scenario." In this case, however, it refers not to an explosion but to an implosion. The victim of this development is mainly East German Protestantism. In 1946, 81 percent of the population was Protestant; in 1990, this dropped to 26 percent. In 1946, only 12 percent of the population was Catholic in East Germany; in 1990, this declined to 6 percent, most of whom were migrants from Catholic areas that were previously part of Germany but were lost after World War II. Many of these people continued on to West Germany until 1961, when the Berlin Wall was built.

East German secularization was "forced" because two different secularizations came together. East Germany was oriented towards Western Europe and thus came to experience the associated *cultural* secularization with all of the known consequences. In addition to this came the *political* secularization promoted by the Soviet Union and all its satellite states until 1989. This consisted of a strategy of exclusion or even persecution of Christians and churches that connected seamlessly to the earlier church hostility of national socialism up until 1945. Atheistic propaganda also played a role in this development. This was a continuation of German Social Democracy's criticism of the Christian church in the nineteenth century.[6] All this took place against the background of a complex confessional history, the presentation of which would, however, go beyond the scope of this article. In short: medieval-forced proselytizing from above (Charlemagne's wars against the Saxons), the heartland of the Reformation (Martin Luther in Wittenberg), the Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth century and the subsequent era of confessionalization, the close connection between throne and altar (Prussian-Protestant regional rulers' church rule), initially delayed and then rapid industrialization, and consequent internal migrations, which led to the deterioration of the confessional milieus (socialist labor movement).

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[4] The more recent numbers from the "Chicago-Study" (Beliefs about God across Time and Countries, from 2012) were widely discussed in Germany, see, e.g., http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article139052087/Jesus-passt-zu-Ostdeutsch land.html (accessed August 15, 2022).

[5] See Deutscher Bundestag, ed., *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland" (12. Wahlperiode des Deutschen Bundestages)*, vol. 6 (*Rolle und Selbstverständnis der Kirchen in den verschiedenen Phasen der SED-Diktatur*) (Baden-Baden: Nomos-Verlag-Gesellschaft, 1995), 130.

[6] See Sebastian Prüfer, *Sozialismus statt Religion: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vor der religiösen Frage 1863-1890* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); Thomas Schmidt-Lux, "Science as Religion: The role of scientism in the secularization process in East Germany," in *Religion and the Secular in Eastern Germany, 1945 to the Present*, eds. Esther Peperkamp and Małgorzata Rajtar (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 19-40.

For this reason, the consequences of secularization in East Germany are more dramatic than in other parts of former socialist areas, which are still largely influenced by confessional identities (mainly Catholic or Orthodox). Similar developments, like those in the former GDR, can be found in the broad scope only in the Czech Republic. Overall, one can speak of an incipient "atheistic semicircle" that started in Estonia and Latvia. This circle goes around Lithuania and Poland and over the Nordic countries – including Denmark and the Netherlands – and then over northern and eastern Germany down to Bohemia. If Western Europe is a "disaster area for the churches," as Peter L. Berger once observed, then East Germany is the epicenter.[7]

Yet, the trend in other German regions has been going in the same direction: although shortly after reunification, the proportion of the religiously unaffiliated among the entire population in terms of percentage was 73 (for East Germany) versus 11 (for West Germany), twenty years later, it was 78 (for East Germany) versus 31 (for West Germany) – figures that are still on the rise in both parts of Germany.[8] Whether the situation in East Germany foreshadows the future of Christianity in Western Europe is hard to predict. In any case, 41 percent of the German population (East and West combined) is currently without religious affiliation.[9]

The situation in East Germany is unprecedented for the proclamation of the Christian faith. During its history of two thousand years, the Christian church has never been confronted with a predominantly nonreligious culture. Religious representations have always been widespread; they were purified or contested, but they also offered points of departure for the Christian message. In the eighth century, Boniface sawed down a holy oak tree to demonstrate the victory of Christianity. What could be sawed down in East Germany today?

Moreover, the number of established worldviews has nowadays become so large that the Canadian philosopher of religion, Charles Taylor, compared them with the explosion of a star, a "nova."[10] This development, which started in the nineteenth century among the elites – in those days, there were materialists, traditionalists, nihilists, romanticists, monarchists, socialists, etc., al-

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[7] Peter L. Berger, "An die Stelle von Gewißheiten sind Meinungen getreten. Der Taumel der Befreiung und das wachsende Unbehagen darüber," in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 7, 1998, no. 105, 14.

[8] See Sozialreport 2010: Angleichung der Lebensverhältnisse – DDR/neue Länder/früheres Bundesgebiet/alte Länder, "Religion – konfessionslos," https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/tabelle-lebensverhaeltnisse-in-ost-und-west-a-714702.html (accessed August 15, 2022)

[9] The situation on December 31, 2020: 27% Roman-Catholic, 24% Protestant (together, 51%; this percentage decreased to less than 50% in 2022), 2% Orthodox, 4% confessional Muslims, 3% other denominations; see Forschungsgruppe Weltanschauungen in Deutschland – fowid, Religionszugehörigkeiten 2020, https://fowid.de/meldung/religionszugehoerigkeiten-2020 (accessed August 15, 2022).

[10] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 411f.

though the church of the common people remained largely intact and homogeneous – has become a common discussion topic around kitchen tables and during family reunions: the nova has become a supernova. Parents often can no longer empathize with the attitudes of their children regarding faith, the idea of a family, leisure preferences, etc. Grandchildren do not understand the world of their grandparents. How do we eat and live? Do we want children or not? How do we live or die? In sum, one can speak of a multitude of existential cultures.[11]

It is impossible to turn this development around. On the contrary, it is taking place in every one of us. The others are always present in us: of all the things that are important or sacred to me, I know that other people see these things differently. Hence, inside every Christian, there is also a small atheist. People switch between various worldviews, depending on their circumstances and even their stages of life. This used to be different in regions where the traditional church of the common people stood on strong ground: in these regions, people were naturally Catholic or Protestant and remained so. Moreover, the supernova is nowadays also happening in other religious cultures, for instance, in Islam.

It is not easy to get a general overview of this confessional landscape. If we ask sociologists, they will respond with a broad variety of categories. For example, a Berlin study in the late 1990s distinguishes between those who believe in God, a belief in transcendence, atheists, and the undecided.[12] At the same time, the sociologists of religion, Detlev Pollack and Gert Pickel, take note of a clearly profiled group of nonreligious in addition to average Christians, the socially churched, the religious but non-churched, committed Christians, and syncretists.[13] The Viennese pastoral theologian, Paul Zulehner, registered as worldview options: humanism, naturalism, Christianity, theism (specifically moving away from Christian belief in God), Far East religion, atheism, and anomie (life is meaningless).[14] As dominant mixtures, one can then identify naturalistic humanists, the general framework of atheism, Christians, and religious-composers (syncretists).[15] In connection with the "Bertelsmann Religion Monitor," Heiner Meulemann lines up the following five positions on the path to secularization: "From theism and deism to existentialism [self-realization] and to naturalism [esp. Evolutionism]" and

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[11] See Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 159-184.

[12] See Klaus-Peter Jörns, "Was die Menschen wirklich glauben: Ergebnisse einer Umfrage," in *Gewagter Glaube: Gott zur Sprache bringen in säkularer Gesellschaft*, ed. Thomas Brose (Berlin: Morus, 1998), 123.

[13] Detlef Pollack and Gert Pickel, "Individualisierung und religiöser Wandel in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 28 (1999): 466.

[14] See Paul Michael Zulehner, Isa Hager, and Regina Polak, *Kehrt die Religion wieder? Religion im Leben der Menschen 1970-2000* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2001), 79, 82.

[15] See Zulehner et al., *Kehrt die Religion wieder?*, 84.

agnosticism.[16] In a study of participants of Protestant religious education from 2003 in Thuringia, one can identify amongst the eighth to tenth graders: religious, critically religious, doubters and detached, openly nonreligious, and questioners.[17] This goes on and on.

These groups are usually distinguished sociologically by certain characteristics. This type of characterization is useful, but it usually lacks a philosophy of religion or even theological interpretation of the data. It is precisely this that shall be attempted in the following discussion of *homo indifferens.*

Interpretations: The Religiously Indifferent

The religiously indifferent – sometimes also called "nones"[18] – form a special group. It is difficult to determine the size of this group among the unaffiliated because they are usually not distinguished from the atheists,[19] although they do not actually belong to this group.[20] This is because atheists

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[16] Heiner Meulemann, "Säkularisierung oder religiöse Erneuerung? Weltanschauungen in 22 Gesellschaften: Befunde und Hinweise einer Querschnittserhebung," in *Woran glaubt die Welt? Analysen und Kommentare zum Religionsmonitor 2008*, ed. Bertelsmann Stiftung (Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009), 698.

[17] See Hartwig Kiesow, *Jugendliche zwischen Atheismus und religiöser Kompetenz: Eine empirische Untersuchung zur Religiosität und zu Teilnahmemotiven für den Besuch des Evangelischen Religionsunterrichts unter 3889 Schülerinnen und Schülern der Klassen 8, 9 und 10 in Thüringen* (Jena: Akademikerverlag, 2003), 351 passim, https://www.db-thueringen.de/receive/dbt_mods_00001753?q=kiesow%20 hartwig# (accessed August 15, 2022).

[18] See Glenn M. Vernon, "The religious 'nones'. A neglected category," *Journal for the scientific study of religion* 7 (1968): 219-229. Among German Protestant sociologists of religion, the qualification "Konfessionslose" [without confession] is commonly used, see Lutz Motikat and Helmut Zeddies, eds., *Konfession: keine: Gesellschaft und Kirchen vor der Herausforderung durch Konfessionslosigkeit – nicht nur in Ostdeutschland. Ausgewählte Beiträge der Studien-und Begegnungsstätte Berlin* (Frankfurt a. M.: Gemeinschaftswerk der Evangelischen Publizistik Abteilung Verlag, 1997).

[19] See "World Values Survey" from 1995-1997, quoted in Paul Froese and Steven Pfaff, "Explaining a religious anomaly. A historical analysis of secularization in Eastern Germany," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 4 (2005): 397f. The above-mentioned Chicago-Study from 2012 counts "agnostics" but does not address the statistic about this matter, see Tom W. Smith, *Beliefs about God across Time and Countries*, https://www.norc.org/PDFs/Beliefs_about_God_Report.pdf (accessed August 15, 2022).

[20] Some statistics designate the specific group "agnostics," see Center for the Study of Global Christianity at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (South Hamilton MA), ed., *Christianity in its Global Context, 1970-2020: Society, Religion, and Mission*, 6 passim, https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/2ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf (accessed August 15, 2022); see also the statistics in Todd M. Johnson, Gina A. Zurlo, Albert W. Hickman, and Peter F. Crossing, "Christianity 2015: Religious diversity and personal contact," *International*

believe that God *does not* exist, while the religiously indifferent and the agnostics *do not believe* that God exists. It is therefore necessary to distinguish where the respective negation is located. Atheists stand by a certain proposition ("that God does not exist") as believers;[21] they are "confessors of nothing." Agnostics, on the other hand, refrain from any opinion; like Immanuel Kant in his critique of reason, they are "non-confessors."[22] In this case, the negation concerns the propositional attitude, not the proposition itself. With the religiously indifferent it is not the same. While atheists and agnostics participate in the discourses about "God and the world," for *homo indifferens,*[23] the question about God is irrelevant or even incomprehensible. *Homo indifferens* is not a seeker or a questioner but simply nonreligious. Like Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas, *homo indifferens* is "religiously unmusical."[24]

In the area of the former GDR, the religiously indifferent make up a relatively stable milieu, an "atheism of the people" analogous to the "Catholicism of the people" or the "Protestantism of the people" in other regions. Without making their own decision for or against religion, these people are distant from all the churches and all kinds of religion, often going back several generations. They are not "alienated" from the church but rather "untouched" by it.[25] Their "worldview" is strongly influenced by the natural sciences and thus is scientistic. In this regard, the atheist propaganda of the communist era is still especially influential: religion of any kind is deemed unscientific and premodern. Another characteristic is a sober pragmatism that allows for the engagement in magical or religious practices only in so-called borderline situations. This is, however, perceived as a symptom of a crisis

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Bulletin of Missionary Research 39 (2015): 28-29, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280533909_Christianity_2015_Religious_Diversity_and_Personal_Contact (accessed August 15, 2022): "nonreligionists," "agnostics," and "atheists."

[21] André Comte-Sponville, *Woran glaubt ein Atheist? Spiritualität ohne Gott* (Zürich: Diogenes, 2009), 89: "If you meet someone who says: 'I know that God does not exist,' that is not an atheist, but an idiot. And this is also true in my opinion, when someone says to you 'I know that God exists.' That is an idiot who holds his faith for knowledge."

[22] To these terms, see Herbert Schnädelbach, "Der fromme Atheist," in *Wiederkehr des Atheismus. Fluch oder Segen für die Theologie?*, ed. Magnus Striet (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 12.

[23] The term *homo indifferens* is used in the Vatican strategy paper of the Pontifical Council for Culture (see above, note 2), no. 1 passim.

[24] Eberhard Tiefensee, "'Religiös unmusikalisch': Zu einer Metapher Max Webers," in *Zeiten des Übergangs: Festschrift für Franz Georg Friemel zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Bertram Pittner and Andreas Wollbold (Leipzig: Benno-Verlag, 2000), 119-136.

[25] See Michal Kaplánek, "Entfremdete oder vom christlichen Glauben unberührte Jugend?," in *Jugend – Kirche – Atheismus: Brückenschläge zwischen Ostdeutschland und Tschechien*, eds. Michal Kaplánek and Maria Widl (České Budějovice/Erfurt: Südböhmische Universität Budweis in Kooperation mit Universität Erfurt, 2006), 88f.

which will then disappear as the difficult situation is overcome. There is no reason, therefore, to deal more closely with metaphysical or religious questions ("life must go on"). Family associations and other social networks provide a grounding existential foothold in life, not a faith. The passages of life are accompanied by secular rituals (birth, first school enrollment, "Jugendweihe" or "youth dedication," a secular alternative to confirmation, civil marriage, secular funeral) so that church or religion is unnecessary. To the questions as to whether they are "Christian" or "atheistic," they react with surprise, as categories such as "Christian," "religious," "belief in God," and their counterparts are meaningless in their self-perception. They simply refer to themselves as "normal."[26]

Only since the 1990s have the religiously indifferent been recognized in academic discourse. This raises two questions: a) Why is the recognition of this group so difficult? b) How can we interpret the phenomenon?

Does the Homo Indifferens *Even Exist?*

The main reason for the lack of recognition of this group is likely the *sententia communis* that human beings are "incurably religious,"[27] and, therefore, the *homo indifferens* cannot actually exist. The existence of the *homo indifferens* would, in fact, contradict some basic assumptions of philosophical and theological anthropology. Kant, the alleged "destroyer of metaphysics," held that there is a "natural disposition to metaphysics" in humanity, which makes the demand for "some kind of metaphysics" and "metaphysical investigation" an ineradicable anthropological given.[28] Karl Rahner also held the existence of nonreligious people as unimaginable. Such a person "would have forgotten the whole and its foundation and at the same time forgotten (if one may say) that he had forgotten. What would happen then? We can only say: He would cease to be a human being. He would have crossed back to being a resourceful animal."[29]

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[26] See Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Religionslosigkeit als Thema der Religionssoziologie," *Pastoraltheologie* 90 (2001): 152.

[27] See Auguste Sabatier, *Religionsphilosophie auf psychologischer und geschichtlicher Grundlage* (Freiburg: Herder, 1898), 3.

[28] See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2nd ed. [1787], in *Kants Werke*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Reimer, 1904), Vorrede zur zweiten Auflage, 19 (KrV B, 21); Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik* [1783], in *Kants Werke*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1903), §60, 362 (Prol. A, 192).

[29] Karl Rahner, "Meditation über das Wort 'Gott'," in *Wer ist das eigentlich – Gott?*, ed. Hans Jürgen Schultz (München: Kösel, 1969), 17f.: "hätte das Ganze und seinen Grund vergessen und zugleich vergessen (wenn man noch so sagen könnte), dass er vergessen hat. Was wäre dann? Wir können nur sagen: Er würde aufhören, ein Mensch zu sein. Er hätte sich zurückgekreuzt zum findigen Tier." Rahner (1904-1984) was a theologian at the Jesuitenkolleg Innsbruck and is held to be one of the most important Catholic theologians of the twentieth century.

These and similar statements[30] represent not only fundamental anthropological theories, but perhaps also offer a calming effect in the face of the clear decline of Christianity in the Western world: in principle, everyone can be presumed to be religious.

However, the situation in East Germany shows a different picture. The decline of established Christianity here is a decline of religion and of interest in religious matters altogether. So, this is not just about a pluralization, individualization, or religion becoming invisible in the usual understanding, and not even a "fuzzy fidelity"[31] (even though all of this is also in East Germany). A starting point for the Christian message and for religion in general is difficult to find. At best, the trained eye in the study of religion can identify "equivalents of religion." Here, however, caution is called for. Scholars of religion might come to similar conclusions as anthropologists who suspect human-like behavior in animals. Animals are indifferent to these anthropological hermeneutics. The religiously indifferent are also not interested in whether or not they are characterized as "actually somehow religious." Sometimes there is resistance to this kind of examination or at least problems in communication.

The problem is that if the anthropological determination *homo naturaliter religiosus* is true, and therefore people are "incurably religious," then there can be no people without religion, or as we may say more precisely, there are no nonreligious people.[32] Consequently, one must only search long enough to find eventually the religiosity among the supposedly "religiously unmusical." But there is a fallacy here.[33] One cannot make deductive logical claims about the individual case of "every human being" from general statements of philosophical and theological anthropology about "the human being." "Every human being" is essentially (!) different from all other human beings. Here one might point to the example of the statement: "The human

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[30] For an introductory presentation with similar remarks from Max Weber, Jürgen Habermas, Emerich Coreth, Herbert Schnädelbach, and Fritz Stolz, see Eberhard Tiefensee, "'Unheilbar religiös' oder 'religiös unmusikalisch'? Philosophische Anmerkungen zum Phänomen der religiösen Indifferenz," in *Religionserschließung im konfessionslosen Kontext: Fragen, Impulse, Perspektiven*, eds. Michael Domsgen and Frank Lütze (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 23-44, 23-28.

[31] David Voas, "The rise and fall of fuzzy fidelity in Europe," *European Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (2009): 155-168.

[32] Detlef Pollack distinguishes between the "religiously affinitive" and the "religiously equivalent," as Peter A. Berger, Klaus Hock, and Thomas Klie explain: "In the first case we are dealing with a citable reference to the explicitly religious, in which references can be identified which themselves can be determined in terms of content, in the second case it has to do with a structural analogy, in which only functional references are demonstrable." Peter A. Berger, Klaus Hock, and Thomas Klie, "Religionshybride – Zur Einführung," in *Religionshybride: Religion in post-traditionalen Kontexten*, eds. Peter A. Berger, Klaus Hock, and Thomas Klie (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013), 28.

[33] In the following remarks, I draw upon my publication: Tiefensee, "Unheilbar religiös," 29-33.

being is a rational being (*animal rationale*)," a claim of philosophical anthropology. But embryos, Alzheimer patients, severely mentally disabled people, and those who have lived unconsciously for years in a comatose state are concrete counterexamples. The *homo indifferens* is a similar case; it is a concrete counterexample to the philosophical statement, "human beings are naturally religious." Likewise, the following statement belongs to theological anthropology: "God is not far from anyone, and therefore there are no human beings without God" (see Acts 17:27: God "is not far from each one of us"). Nevertheless, it is conceivable and actually possible to live concretely without God (or an equivalent) entirely. Thus, the findings of philosophical and theological anthropology are one thing, whereas the findings of empirical religious studies are another. Both perspectives must be carefully distinguished and only then mediated with one another.

The usual strategy of changing the meaning of the basic terms "religious" and "religion" so that they can apply to each individual case, or to operate with the notion that something is "holy" for every human being, leads only to confusion ("cooking as a religious practice").[34] In this regard, the following rules of thumb are applicable:

-    It must be possible to distinguish between a replacement-religion and a replacement of religion. The latter is not religion.
-    The internal perspective is to be sufficiently appreciated in order not to assume religion or religiosity where it clearly contradicts the individual's self-understanding. The religiously unaffiliated often respond with irritation to such attributions. The presence of religion and religiosity can be legitimately asserted only when there is a reference to an absolute, and not when

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[34] Adrian Portmann, "Kochen als religiöse Praxis. Über Religion in der Moderne und die Schwierigkeit, sie zu erkennen," in *Religiosität in der Postmoderne*, ed. Uwe Gerber (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1998), 81-99; see Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), 57. At first, he is undecided about whether "an alternative food in the cafeteria" is religion or not. Then he argues that a wrong criterion could lead to every unusual thing being counted as religion (Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 146). An almost sarcastic account of various definitions of "religion" is offered by Detlef Pollack, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos?* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 10f.: "It is very unclear what makes up this individualized, invisible religion which is distanced from the church. It is also unclear what holds its various parts together […]. It can be found in the extra-ecclesial forms of religious orientation, new religious movements, New Age, psycho-cults, the occult, spiritualism or cultic milieus, as well as in the Rajneesh movement, neo-Germanic paganism, Bach flower therapy, energy training, Zen meditation, the 'small life world' of the bodybuilders, the strange world of water-witching rods and pendulum swingers, the world-view and self-view of postmodern youth or even in the cult of football/soccer, in light music, in amazement at the wonders of nature or in political protest groups." See also Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 200-203, to the argument "football is really a religion."

this remains implicit, or only visible for the outside observer who is trained in religious studies. This will be addressed further in the following section.

How is Religious Indifference to be Understood?

Religious indifference is well exemplified in East Germany. Detlef Pollack, who conducted research for many years in Frankfurt-Oder in the field of sociology of religion especially with a view to East Germany, has developed an accurate typology of this issue, which the Leipzig sociologist, Kornelia Sammet, developed into the following outline:[35]

A typology of references to the problem of contingency:

	Religious question (consciousness of contingency)	*Religious answer (references to religious semantic)*
Religious quest	+	-
Religious routine	-	+
Religious vitality	+	+
Religious indifference (pragmatism)	-	-

The outline prevents the unaffiliated from being classified entirely as somehow religious seekers (first line). In this table, there is also a group of the religiously indifferent, those who are not seeking (fourth line). They are characterized by the absence of a consciousness of contingency (second and fourth line). The observation is correct, but it remains inexplicable: Is the contingent human being not necessarily required to deal with his or her finitude?[36] How then is religious indifference conceivable?

An interdisciplinary perspective is necessary for understanding this matter.[37] I shall limit myself here to a transcendental-philosophical considera-tion.[38] Apparently, one must distinguish between a universally human and

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[35] See Detlef Pollack, "Was ist Religion? Probleme der Definition," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 3 (1995): 188f.; Kornelia Sammet, "Atheism and Secularism; Cultural Heritage in East Germany," in *Religious Identity and National Heritage. Empirical-Theological Perspectives*, eds. Francis-Vincent Anthony and Hans-Georg Ziebertz (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 274.

[36] Hermann Lübbe claims that religion as "Kontingenzbewältigungspraxis" is resistant to enlightenment. See his *Religion nach der Aufklärung* (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1986), 149f.

[37] See Eberhard Tiefensee, "Religiöse Indifferenz als interdisziplinäre Herausfor-derung," in *Religion und Religiosität im vereinigten Deutschland: Zwanzig Jahre nach dem Umbruch*, eds. Gert Pickel and Kornelia Sammet (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2011), 79-101.

[38] To the following, see Saskia Wendel, "Sich Unbedingtem verdankt fühlen? Reli-gionsphilosophische Anmerkungen zur Religiosität von Jugendlichen," in *Jugend, Religion, Religiosität: Resultate, Probleme und Perspektiven der aktuellen Religio-sitätsforschung*, eds. Ulrich Kropač, Uto Meier, and Klaus König (Regensburg: Pustet, 2012), 123-138. Wendel draws upon the theories of self-consciousness from

non-thematic "lived-contingency" or a "contingency-intuition" from that which constitutes a "contingency-experience" or a "contingency-conscious-ness," for example, that we are all born and thus we have not initiated our own existence, or that we are endangered in our existence and, at some point, must die and are thus an "existence unto death." These are contingency-experiences that are the result of processes of interpretation, and are socially, culturally, and, above all, linguistically mediated, for example, through en-counters with birth and death in our environment. This is similar with other borderline-experiences. All these are characterized by the fact that they are punctually directed to specific objects that are never simply given in an unmediated way, but are the result of lived-contingency, interpretation (for example, through the categories of understanding that Kant articulated), and (linguistic, ritual) articulation. With the term "lived-contingency," I intend to describe (only) the general moment of inaccessibility in all intimacy with oneself, which is present in all experiences and, at the same time, points to a reason: "I do not know to whom I owe my existence – the whereof, whereby, and whence of my being." "Knowledge" here is actually a non-thematic ex-periencing of something. Schleiermacher called this the "feeling of absolute dependency."[39]

This lived-contingency is irrefutable, but it is reflected in the individual cases very differently – or not at all – in the experience world in which it is formed through interpretation and articulation. Thus, the lived-experience of the "owed existence" ("verdankte Existenz") does not necessarily lead to a "grateful existence" ("dankbare Existenz") – because this requires an addressee. Despite the general "lived-contingency," the "consciousness of contingency" can be absent, as Pollack and Sammet correctly observe. This is the case with the religiously indifferent. For them, religion does not have to serve as the "practice of the *management* of contingency" (Hermann Lübbe)[40] but, rather, as a "practice of the *disclosure* of contingency" (Michael Schramm).[41]

Dieter Henrich. Wendel is one of the only philosophers of religion who provides the possibility of nonreligiosity, holding that the "Vorstellung, dass alle Menschen von Natur aus religiös sind" is to be given "eine klare Absage" (133).

[39] "Gefühl schlechthinniger Abhängigkeit": Some of the terms here are confusing: "Gefühl" with Schleiermacher does not mean emotion or momentary experience, but a foundational perceptive mental state. Karl Rahner says similarly, "transzendentale Erfahrung" is not an experience but a "Vorgriff [anticipation] auf Sein überhaupt" and thus something that is given in each experience as the condition for the possibility of that experience. Regarding this, see Bernd Irlenborn, "Was ist eine 'transzen-dentale Erfahrung'? Zu den Entwürfen von Krings, Rahner, Lotz und Schaeffler," *Theologie und Philosophie* 79 (2004): 491-510.

[40] See Lübbe, *Religion nach der Aufklärung*, 149f.

[41] See Michael Schramm, *Das Gottesunternehmen. Die katholische Kirche auf dem Religionsmarkt* (Leipzig: Benno-Verlag, 2000), 52-57: Religion ist nicht "Kontin-genz*bewältigungs*praxis," sondern "Kontingenz*eröffnungs*-praxis."

The experiencing subject does not necessarily position him/herself as a "religious" seeker when the consciousness of contingency is present. In this regard, the name of the first line and the first column of the table above ("religious quest") is unclear. As the last column shows, a nonreligious framework of interpretation is also possible. Some tend towards naturalistic fatalism: "I am a product of evolution." A nihilistic version would be: "I am a product of chance of the universe and feel the tragedy, if not the absurdity, of human existence in so far as regardless of the desire for eternity, this existence will disappear both individually and collectively." Karl Marx offered a humanistic variant of this nonreligious consciousness of contingency. In this reading, the human being is an "ensemble of social relations:" "I am a part of humanity in general and should work to serve this." Another example of this phenomenon is "somethingism" (or ietsism): "There is something (between heaven and earth)."[42] Even an atheistic spirituality can be articulated, triggered by an "oceanic feeling" (Romain Rolland, Sigmund Freud). This is, however, articulated in a decidedly nonreligious way as an experience of harmony with being, or the universe as a whole, or with life, etc.[43]

In this we have switched from the subject side to the object side. The same difference between non-thematic lived-experience and interpreted or articulated experience can also be found here as a distinction between implicit and explicit reference to an absolute (see above, the second rule of thumb). According to Kant, reason requires certain regulative ideas and practical postulates if it is to remain reason. This applies not only for the empirical mind (ego/soul, world, God as a regulative idea) and for ethics (ego/freedom, immortality, God as a postulate), but also, as Richard Schaeffler clarifies in his "extended transcendental-philosophy,"[44] for other areas of reason, such as aesthetics, and then for all areas combined. Consequently, every rational being implicitly appeals to an absolute. This happens first in a specific area of reason, for example, in the idea of a final, all-encompassing truth. This

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[42] Around 15 years ago, the term "Ietsisme" was adopted from Dutch and now has a Wikipedia-article https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ietsism (accessed August 15, 2022); see also Lieven Boeve, "La théologie comme conscience critique en Europe: Le défi de l'apophatisme culturel," *Bulletin ET: Zeitschrift für Theologie in Europa* 16, no. 1 (2005): 43; Gijsbert D. Dingemans, *Ietsisme: Een basis voor christelijke spiritualiteit?* (Kampen: Kok, 2005).

[43] The following authors report on such experiences, which they hold to be non-religious, André Comte-Sponville, see above ("Eine mystische Erfahrung"); Michael Schmidt-Salomon, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Warum wir ohne Moral die besseren Menschen sind*, 6th ed. (München: Pendo, 2011), 239-252 ("Rationale Mystik"); Wolfgang Welsch, *Immer nur der Mensch? Entwürfe zu einer anderen Anthropologie* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2011), 200-211 ("Pazifische Reflexionen").

[44] To the following on "erweiterte Transzendentalphilosophie" see Richard Schaeffler, "'Freiheit, die frei macht' – Zur Weiterentwicklung eines transzendentalen Gottesbegriffs," in *Gott und Vernunft: Neue Perspektiven zur Transzendental-philosophie Richard Schaefflers*, eds. Bernd Irlenborn and Christian Trapp (Freiburg: Herder, 2013), 68-93.

may become such an absolute once it recognizes and makes propositional statements. Or even a final concept of justice can rise to this level when it is committed to freedom and morality. Encompassing all areas of reason, and in spite of the many unsolvable contradictions, the rational being hopes that everything "somehow fits together." In this respect, one could call every rational being "implicitly religious."

That one cannot reason to an "object-like" given or even a personal counterpart from these transcendental implications, which are understood as undeniable for every rational person, was already addressed by Kant in his rejection of the Protestant school metaphysics of his time. This would not be a matter of knowledge, but of faith. For Kant, God is only a regulative idea or practical postulate.

To take the step into the "objective" or into the "thematic absolute" requires, as Schaeffler has explained, a genuine experience. He refers to this experience, drawing upon Kant's divine postulate, as religious. The respective religious community provides the framework for interpreting this experience; this framework involves language, tradition, and rituals. With a view to religious indifference and the pluralism of life options, the term "God" is no longer necessary for such a "final instance," if one is even brought into discussion.

However, the following must be noted. It is only in a specific interpretive framework, which has been developed through experience and tradition, that the step is taken from a transcendental-philosophical given, which always implicitly accompanies the (rational) experience, to a quasi-empirical given, which can be uniquely experienced and articulated: "There is a final justice." "I believe in the love of God." Such a step is not obligatory and, if it happens, as shown above, it is not necessarily "religious."

In conclusion, from a transcendental-philosophical perspective, reason is only possible with relation to a "final instance" (generally: *homo naturaliter religiosus*); empirically, however, it can be lacking (specifically: *homo indifferens*). Consequently, there are probably more religious people than secular religious studies see, but probably fewer than the philosophy of religion and theology tend to think.

Thus, the rule is: everyone is not "somehow" religious, because there are many people who are "religiously unmusical." From this emerges a practical-theological question: Are religiously indifferent people lost for every kind of Christian mission? Do they constitute the modern version of the *massa damnata*?

Practical Consequences: The End of Traditional Mission and an Ecumenism of the Third Kind

The degree to which the religiously indifferent can be evangelized is difficult to assess. On the one hand, they represent a form of extremely closed

atheism.[45] Religious issues seem to lie so far beyond the horizon of this group that a point of reference can hardly be found. This is different with atheists and agnostics with whom one can at least discuss these matters. On the other hand, religious indifference must be the most open form of nonbelief – more open than even agnosticism, which, after all, takes a final position, even though it is one of skeptical abstention. The cautious and hesitant curiosity with regard to religious themes that one often experiences in former East Germany confirms this hypothesis. The religiously "untouched" have often been spared the deep wounds – not to mention the "God poisoning"[46] – so that they do not understand the arrogant aggressiveness of an atheist like Richard Dawkins, for example.[47] After the negative images of the scandals of Christianity have been processed, which the media has sometimes high-lighted (e.g., child abuse, the persecution of witches), Christians will be asked to give an account of their religious experience as people who have experience with religion, celebrate church services, and can pray. They are, as one might say, the "God-experienced," and must give an account of this.

Initially, however, the religiously indifferent provoke Christians by the fact that one can also live well and decently without God. I already mentioned above the sober-minded pragmatism of the religiously indifferent.[48] Moreover, in contrast to what is often said, there is no exceptional decline in people's value orientations as a consequence of secularization. Investigations into what people find more or less important show no substantial differences between Christians and the nonreligious.[49] Many so-called Christian values have become so deeply embedded in society that they are accepted as humanistic or simply reasonable. Whether one lives according to these values is another question, but in this respect, Christians are always also striving.

Admittedly, the above is only an outline, but it can be confirmed by closely observing one's acquaintances or by many literary examples. Of course, one should avoid comparing apples and oranges, that is, good Christians and bad non-Christians, a practice that is also quite popular among non-Christians. Nowadays, the question that the "others" also sometimes ask Christians is: Why and to what end are Christians *Christian* after all if one can also live well and decently without God and if the unbaptized can also go to heaven (see Mt 25:31-46)?[50]

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[45] On this term, see Martin E. Marty, *Varieties of Unbelief* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 69-83.

[46] See Tilman Moser, *Gottesvergiftung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1976).

[47] See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

[48] See the above table: "Religious indifference (pragmatism)."

[49] See the processing of various surveys by the "Forschungsgruppe Weltanschauungen in Deutschland," https://fowid.de/meldung/wertevorstellungen-konfessions freier-menschen (accessed August 15, 2022).

[50] Concerning the question of whether the non-baptized can be saved, Pope Benedict XVI's decision to reduce the doctrine of the "limbus puerorum" to a former theological opinion that is not supported by the Magisterium is especially important, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbo#Modern_era (accessed August 15, 2022). This

This requires a paradigm shift in missionary praxis (a), which is based on the experiences of inner-Christian ecumenism ("ecumenism of the first kind") and includes insights from inter-religious dialogue ("ecumenism of the second kind") (b). Christians living in a secular context function as representatives (c). In the *terra incognita* of religious indifference, churches need people to show and pave the way for other people, just like "scouts" (d).

From Deficiency-Paradigm to Alterity-Paradigm

The classic conception of mission operates more or less with a deficiency-paradigm; however, what would be necessary is an alterity-paradigm (from French altérité = otherness). The deficiency-paradigm has as its guiding question: "What is missing on the other side?" The alterity-paradigm, by contrast, asks: "What is different there?" There are good biblical, eschatological, and truth-theoretical reasons for the deficiency-paradigm. It puts the emphasis on instruction, therapy, or even "judgment" of a counterpart entangled in shortcomings (error and sin). Two perspectives form the background, which are derived primarily from the nineteenth century (if not from the European history of colonization) and which have become problematic. Firstly, the "grand narrative" of secularization as a "subtraction story": modernity is the good of humanity minus God and religion. This is welcomed by secular humanism as a step forward while the churches criticize it as a loss. For the most part, however, this story overlooks the quasi-spiritual and innovative driving forces of modernity which have, in their own way, also taken hold of Christianity. The story is thus, at best, a half-truth.[51] On the other side, there is the notion that revelation is a kind of divine instruction of humanity and that Christian mission is the continuance of this. At least since the Second Vatican Council, the established viewpoint has been that revelation is the "real personal self-communication of God," which is to be understood as an event of encounter.[52] Since "mission" is an extension of the sending of Jesus Christ by the Father who is revealing Himself in Jesus Christ, it must now be newly understood in accordance with this.

Traditionally, mission is conceived as situated in an ecclesiocentric frame, as a proselytizing activity. All efforts are directed toward achieving this objective. However, from the perspective of the Christian community,

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doctrine rested on the abandoned thesis that baptism is a necessary condition for salvation.

[51] See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 571-574. From a historical perspective, see Manuel Borutta, "Genealogie der Säkularisierungstheorie. Zur Historisierung einer großen Erzählung der Moderne," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für historische Sozialwissenschaft* 36, no. 3 (2010): 347-376.

[52] See Josef Schmitz, "Das Christentum als Offenbarungsreligion im kirchlichen Bekenntnis," in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, vol. 2 (*Traktat Offenbarung*), eds. Walter Kern, Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, and Max Seckler (Freiburg: Herder, 1985), 23; emphasis in the original.

"mission" is not something centripetal but is rather centrifugal, that is, reaching out to other people. The question regarding the authenticity of every missionary pastorate should therefore be: "Would we also do this when it does not profit us at all?" – e.g., managing day-care centers, schools, and hospitals, organizing street parties, taking and supporting various initiatives, sending chaplains to prisons, police stations, and military operations, etc. If this question cannot be answered affirmatively, all these activities become at least problematic (see Mt 6:3, 10:8, 20:28). In the opposite case, one could get the impression that the Christian church is not interested in us and does not want to do anything for us because it covertly yet actually only exists for itself. Then, the church is only more or less craftily looking for a pretext or an approach to make sure that we will enter the church or that it can recruit us in pastoral service. This is ecclesiocentrism.

The deficiency-paradigm implies the idea of a path to an end, one which the others have either not found or, if they have found it, are comparatively not very far along the way. With the alterity-paradigm comes the idea of very different paths – perhaps with the same goal, or maybe without it. Unlike the deficiency-paradigm, it is not normative but rather purely descriptive. It is more representative of today's experience of pluralism. This calls for communication on an equal footing and is also in line with the so-called philosophy of difference. This philosophy was largely inspired by the European non-salvation-history that culminated in the Shoah of the twentieth century. In the face of an uncircumventable perspectivalism and differences that are often irreconcilable, it not only has to do with tolerance but also accepting the otherness of the other. Some of those associated with this approach are, for example, Emmanuel Lévinas, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida. Out of respect for the otherness of the other, degradations are to be avoided as much as possible. Because of the continuous negations in our case ("a-religious," "non-adherent," "indifferent," "nones," etc.), this is admittedly difficult, but not impossible. In this approach, mission can now be exploratory, and it can try to understand the other person better. The unaffiliated usually do not understand themselves as "lacking religion" but rather as "free of religion." In their assessment, what is deficient is the status of still "needing religion." The mutual claims of deficiency will not, however, bring us further along the way.

Ecumenism of the Third Kind

Against this background, an "ecumenism of the third kind" is to be developed. "Ecumenism of the first kind" means ecumenism among Christians of different denominations; "ecumenism of the second kind" is between different religions (usually called interreligious dialogue); and "ecumenism of the third kind" happens between the religious and the nonreligious. These three kinds of ecumenism are very different. The leading idea for ecumenism among Christians is: one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph 4:5). Inter-reli-

gious dialogue is based on the idea that there may be common religious and spiritual experiences. In the case of ecumenism of the third kind, the common ground is being human in all its dimensions. Despite the differences between these three kinds of ecumenism, there are points of contact and structural analogies. It can be observed that if there is a lack of progress in one of these kinds of ecumenism, new impulses sometimes come from another kind. Ecumenism among Christians originated more than a hundred years ago as a result of getting in touch with other religions, which meant the start of ecumenism of the second kind. People noticed that it made no sense to continue quarreling about issues of faith and the church in front of the eyes of the "others."[53]

In order to unpack the alterity-paradigm of missions in thesis-form, I will rely on some biblical images.

(1) "We know in part" (1 Cor. 13:9): The alterity-paradigm induces, usually reflexively, the suspicion of relativism. But there is a "culture of the relative without relativism."[54] On the one hand, it draws upon the above transcendental "knowledge" of the absolute, which ultimately exceeds our power of control; on the other hand, it draws upon our uncircumventable dependency upon others in the otherness of the other. The actual place of truth then turns out to be less the point of agreement and more the point of irre-concilable differences – according to this, both partners would, in spite of all mutual incomprehension and all the problems of acceptance, lack their own respective goals, because the difference as such makes them mutually aware of the fact that *veritas semper maior*.[55] This will appear to be relativism only to those who attempt to rise to a near-divine standpoint and, from this perspective, view all the labors below, depending on the temperament, dis-passionately and skeptically, or somewhat nauseated, but indeed, in the end, tending ultimately toward the deficiency-paradigm. Ecumenism of any kind, to draw upon an image from Plato, may appear only as the second-best route. However, absolute truth of one or the other side, in whatever way this is defined, does not have the final word; rather, love does, as is clear from the context of the Pauline statement.[56]

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[53] "Als Geburtsstunde der ökumenischen Bewegung gilt die Weltmissionskonferenz von Edinburgh im Jahr 1910. Die dort anwesenden Vertreter der evangelischen Missionsbewegung stellten fest, die Spaltung der Christenheit sei eines der stärksten Hindernisse für die Weltmission." See Walter Kasper, *Ökumenische Bewegung und Evangelisierung (im Kontext der menschlichen Mobilität)*, http://www.vatican.va/ roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/pom2006_102/rc_pc_ migrants_pom102_ okumen ische-kasper.html (accessed August 15, 2022)

[54] Wolfram Hogrebe, *Das Absolute* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1998), 15.

[55] See Richard Schaeffler, *Erfahrung als Dialog mit der Wirklichkeit: Eine Untersuchung zur Logik der Erfahrung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 212-214 passim.

[56] See Karl Jaspers's treatment of the "liebenden Kampf," in *Philosophie*, ed. Karl Jaspers, vol. 2 (*Existenzerhellung*), 4th ed. (Berlin: Springer, 1973), 65ff. 242ff. passim.

(2) "Salt of the earth": Under this title, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger gave an interview in 1996 in which one may find this sentence: "Maybe we need to take leave of the idea of a church of the people."[57] One could try to extend this tentative statement to the institutional power structure of the church which has been represented for a long time in Germany. To generalize it metaphorically, salt is not a staple food, as everyone who has ever had a spoonful of it knows (Eberhard Jüngel).[58] In order to be effective, the other of one's self is necessary as a medium, lest the adding of flavorful spice should digress to over-salting. For this reason, an areligious milieu is more suitable than the church of the people milieu for a Christian missionary assignment which is conceptualized in the exploratory sense. Its goal cannot be the disappearance of its operational area. On the contrary, it should seek to be challenged by the otherness of the other in order to proceed anew to a better understanding of one's own faith. Only then can an offer to faith be made: "Proposer la foi."[59] What then arises from this is no longer a matter of the mission assignment; it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

(3) "One body and many members" (1 Cor. 12:12-30): One can understand a globally networked world society as an organism, to which the Pauline image of the church as the one body of Christ with the many inter-related members can be extended, in order to grasp true *oikuméne* in the sense of the inhabited world.[60] This global organism, which encompasses time and space, presents itself today more than ever as differentiated and specialized to a high degree. This brings with it the need to accept partial deficits (everyone cannot do everything). Apparently, there are believers who believe (and pray) with and for the others, while the "religiously unmusical" have other skills and other tasks. Paul would remind us, for example, that "the nonbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the nonbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband" (1 Cor. 7:14).

Vicarious Religion

Grace Davie has made an interesting proposal in this regard with her concept of "vicarious religion." This would have the following tasks:

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[57] Joseph Ratzinger, *Salz der Erde: Christentum und katholische Kirche an der Jahrtausendwende. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Dt. Verlags-Anstalt, 1996), 17.

[58] Eberhard Jüngel, *Reden für die Stadt. Zum Verhältnis von Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde* (München: Kaiser, 1978), 22f.

[59] See Hadwig Müller, Norbert Schwab, and Werner Tzscheetzsch, eds., *Sprechende Hoffnung – werdende Kirche: Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle. Den Glauben vorschlagen in der heutigen Gesellschaft* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2001). The title follows a pastoral letter of the French bishops from 1998.

[60] Compare here especially the cosmological-Christological visions from P. Teilhard de Chardin.

[C]hurches and church leaders perform ritual on behalf of others
[…]. Church leaders and churchgoers believe on behalf of others
and incur criticism if they do not do this properly. […] Thirdly,
church leaders and churchgoers are expected to embody moral
codes on behalf of others […]. Churches, finally, can offer space
for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies.[61]

Davie's starting point is that of a former state church, as the Anglican
Church was in England. For the East German situation, this theoretical
analysis would probably need to be modified.[62] In the East German context,
one would especially emphasize the reciprocal effect. This is because the
representation goes in both directions. The religiously indifferent represent
the loss of the experience of God, with all its negative but also purifying con-
sequences for a deeper life of faith.[63]

It would be more important to expand and deepen the "vicarious" con-
cept theologically, which can only be hinted at here. The "vertical" dimension
is already well known: Christ died in our place for our sins (see 2 Cor. 5:14).
"Horizontally," however, it remains often theologically under-developed.
The idea of "vicarious religion" would go against the strong individualization
of today's understanding of religion (which is, above all, a consequence of
the Reformation) if it was "principally opposed to a representative resolution
of the religious relationship."[64] Seen in this way, it is remarkable that Christof
Gestrich, a Protestant theologian, in a compre-hensive study on the concept
of substitution even speaks of an "intercessory existence."[65] The term *inter-
cessio* is one of many Latin words for the German term *Stellvertretung* (sub-
stitution, representation),[66] and in Catholic worship, it is the term for *Fürbitte*

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[61] Grace Davie, "Religion in 21st-century Europe. Framing the Debate," *The Irish
Theological Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2013): 282.

[62] See regarding this Davie, "Religion in 21st-century Europe," 289f.

[63] See provocatively, Simone Weil, *Zeugnis für das Gute. Spiritualität einer Philo-
sophin* (Zürich: Benziger, 1998), 189: "To that extent that religion is a source of
consolation it is also an obstacle to true faith, and in this sense atheism is a purifica-
tion. I should be an atheist with the part of me that is not made for God. Among the
people in whom their supernatural part is not awakened, the atheists are right and the
believers are wrong." Bartholomäus del Monte, a spiritual author of the eighteenth
century summarized this in this brief remark: "Search after the God of consolations,
not the consolations of God." *Worte Jesu an das Herz des Priesters oder Betrachtun-
gen für Geistliche auf alle Tage des Monats, aus dem Italienischen des Bartholomäus
del Monte, Weltpriesters in Bologna* (Sulzbach: Seidelsche Buchhand-lung, 1839),
56.

[64] Johannes Weiß, *Handeln und handeln lassen: Über Stellvertretung* (Opladen:
Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 20.

[65] Christof Gestrich, *Christentum und Stellvertretung: Religionsphilosophische
Untersuchungen zum Heilsverständnis und zur Grundlegung der Theologie* (Tübin-
gen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 446.

[66] For an extensive treatment, see Stephan Schaede, *Stellvertretung: Begriffsge-
schichtliche Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), esp. the summary, 269-271.

(intercessory prayer). In Gestrich's analysis, however, more is intended. Connecting to the concept of the priesthood of all believers (which is particularly important for the Protestant profile), Gestrich makes it clear that this is not only about the right to participate in decisions but also about being and doing the work of a "priest."[67] If one follows this idea, then all Christians have the task of going before God on behalf of others, as Moses did for the people on Mount Sinai (Ex. 32:10-14), or as he raised his hands to heaven on the hill as his people were in battle – as long as he prayed, they were victorious (Ex. 17:8-13). In this sense, the church becomes an advocate or a representative replacement. The church must be prepared "to make intercession, to jump into the breach in the city walls."[68] Those who are represented do not, and do not have to agree with this necessarily. Parents also represent their children without their express consent.[69] Nevertheless, a place is kept free for them, in this case, for the religiously indifferent, so that they can come and take it at any time.

As the provocative Pauline example of the sanctification of the non-believing spouse shows, ecumenism begins at home (*oikos*). As there are increasingly inter-confessional and inter-religious marriages and families, there are also marriages between Christians, atheists, and religiously indifferent people. New rituals for the Catholic wedding ceremony are providing a way to recognize this more explicitly. The resulting confessional patchwork-families have, with all the diversity of the possible constellation (ecumenism of the first, second, or third kind), similar challenges: Which religious festivals should be celebrated, and how? Which biographical rites of passage should be adopted? How should the child learn to pray? How should all of this be communicated to the extended family?[70] Similar cases are found in religiously "mixed" schools, social institutions of churches, parliaments, etc. All this calls for practical responses that come too hesitantly from those who are responsible for these matters. In the meantime, practiced examples provide the first tentative steps.[71] Maybe the domestic microcosm and the actions

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[67] See Gestrich, *Christentum und Stellvertretung*, 135.

[68] Gestrich, *Christentum und Stellvertretung*, 135.

[69] The lack of agreement among those who are represented or substituted in the "vicarious religion" is a decisive argument against Davie's concept, according to Steve Bruce and David Voas, "Vicarious religion: An examination and critique," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25, no. 2 (2010): 243-259. In response, see Grace Davie, "Vicarious religion: A response," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25, no. 2 (2010): 261-266. She refers to the role of religion in a post-secular society with reference to Habermas.

[70] See Eberhard Tiefensee, "Konfessionsverschieden – konfessionsverbunden," in *Den österlichen Mehrwert im Blick. Theologische Beiträge zu einer Kirche im Umbruch*, eds. Benedikt Kranemann and Maria Widl (Würzburg: Echter 2012), 195-207.

[71] To the present practical experiences and the normative viewpoints which may be drawn from these, see Eberhard Tiefensee, "Ökumene mit Atheisten und religiös Indifferenten," *εὐangel. Magazin für missionarische Pastoral* 6, no. 2 (2015),

on the ground can motivate the world(-church) to greater "ecumenical" efforts?

Scouts in the Terra Incognita *of Religious Indifference*[72]

Those who want to engage in a "mission" into the cluttered regions of the "supernova" need "scouts" who can show different ways or even pave new roads. Such scouts or, to use a biblical expression, spies (1 Sam 26:4; Jos 2:1, 6:23) are, *first,* the "mixed"-marriages, mentioned above. *Second,* they are the people sent by the Christian church itself, e.g., those involved in special spiritual care in hospitals, prisons, barracks, and other missionary fields. They are also the "ordinary faithful" who are in regular contact with the world around them and see themselves as missionaries. Equipped with relevant competencies, they are on their way to propose the faith. In this regard, something needs to be altered in the consciousness of church leadership. The "normal" (until recently) kind of pastoral care should be redirected to serve mainly the mental preparation of those who are sent on the way. These people are the center of all other activities, and they should get the means to do their work. They should either follow other scouts, who are already on the way in various milieus and problem zones of the pluralistic society, or they should become the first scouts themselves, penetrating what has been until now an inaccessible *terra incognita.*

For these territories in the *terra incognita,* which were still blocked for the church, the *third* group is important. They are the scouts who left their church or "distanced" themselves from it. They are, to a greater or lesser degree, churchly socialized, even though they consider this past sometimes as an onerous backpack they would like to throw off. Among these people, could there possibly be some with a mission, for and together with Christ who is the big unknown and who is sometimes unnoticeable on their side? One can think here of the story of the men of Emmaus (Lk 24:16). If they obey the voice of their conscience, if they follow the pressure of the relations in which they are involved, if they look for an alternative path of life, they, too, may be under a hidden missionary command of the Holy Spirit.

They settle in regions in which many of those belonging to the second group are no longer or not yet accepted because the people who are sent by the church speak a churchly language, which is hard to understand. In the meantime, the people who have distanced themselves from the church or even left it feel at home and recognized. Yet, some of them are so heavily

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www.euangel.de/ausgabe-2-2015/oekumene-und-mission/oekumene-mit-atheisten-und-religioes-indifferen ten/ (accessed August 15, 2022).

[72] Concerning the "Scouts" see Eberhard Tiefensee, "'Mission' neu denken: 'Ökumene der dritten Art' mit Gottes 'anderen' Menschen," in *Mission in säkularer Gesellschaft. Ein Herzensanliegen*, eds. George Augustin and Nikola Eterović (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2020), 235-238.

"infected" by the Gospel that they are able to, so to say, bring fruit in an undercover way. They can be former priests who have established a family, but who are still called upon by Jesus on their way in schools, sports clubs, or political parties, where someone with a clerical outfit would normally not be accepted. They can be politicians, "contaminated" by Christianity, who are active in milieus that resolutely decline religion and who, sometimes without noticing it, are spreading the Gospel. Teresa of Avila, a contemporary of the Reformation, had a shadowy image of such people: "Even if someone leaves again the path he has previously entered, he will gain so much, receive so much light on the short distance that he followed this path that he would benefit from it in his future life. […] Since the truly good can never effectuate something bad."[73]

It is rather improbable that these people would return to the church. Just like Abraham, Moses, Peter, Paul, and Thomas, they may not be *allowed* to return to where they started. Just like Jesus forbade the man from Gerasa, whom he healed from his possession by a demon, to enter the boat and stay with him (Mk 5:18-20), he may also forbid these scouts to return to their starting point. When the time is ripe, the church should follow them into the *terra incognita.* And then they may hear what Jesus said to Paul in Corinth: "I have many in this city who are my people" (Act 18:10).

There is still a *fourth* group of scouts. The church should better allow itself to be informed ("bring into form") also by those who approach the church from the outside, from the experiential domains of their different "existential cultures" – whether they come openly or in a dismissive or even hostile mood does not matter at first. Often, external prophecies have let the church discover its true vocation. One can think of the protection of the environment, human rights, or, topically, the position of women. Perhaps the "others" will not come to Christ, but Christ is coming to the church through the "others." "Ecumenism of the third kind" requires a change of perspective. The question is not what Christians say to them, but what they tell the Christians – and Christ through them – and the Christians may find it difficult to hear this without these "others."

A Look Ahead

From these observations and decadelong experiences with confessional plurality in East Germany – the cradle of the Reformation – we can identify a fundamental principle for all three kinds of ecumenism: nobody tries to draw "the (each time) other" to his or her own side. This seems to be the opposite of the concept of mission, as long as it stays within the ecclesio-centric paradigm and conceives of itself as "magnetism" rather than as "mission."

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[73] Weg der Vollkommenheit, Kap. 20, quoted from Teresa von Ávila, *Die Botschaft Gebet: Aus "Weg der Vollkommenheit,"* Kapitel 19-42, ed. and trans. P. Reinhard Körner OCD (Leipzig: Benno 1988), 28.

However, experience teaches that in the case of "ecumenism of the first kind," the dialogue ceases immediately if one side were to define its goal as: "As a result, everyone will become Catholic or, vice versa, everyone will become Protestant." In Germany, this attitude led to the Thirty Years' War. Clearly, this does not work. One can ask whether the attempt to draw as many people as possible to one's own side has ever functioned in the relations between the religions. Some may point to the successful history of the missions in the so-called Third World, but what about the missionary of the Jews? This was less successful and has been recognized as wrong and has been officially terminated.[74] Of course, conversions and baptisms are not excluded and remain a reason for joy among those whom they join. But this cannot be the goal in the case of Jewish-Christian dialogue. The mission among the Muslims was also rather unsuccessful. Therefore, the realistic prognosis is that, regarding the religiously indifferent as well, the efforts to draw them to the side of Christianity will be meager. Christians should do what was analyzed above in terms of "being the salt of the earth": "Proposer la foi" – propose faith.

Yet, in which direction is all this going? The concrete goal cannot be defined exactly either in the case of internal Christian ecumenism, or in that of interreligious dialogue, or in that of an ecumenical get-together with the religiously unaffiliated and the indifferent. After all, that is God's affair. The image of the body of Christ, which should be built up, refers to the project that God has initiated since the beginning of time and that He tenaciously and patiently pursues through history, not only through the history of the Christian church but also through that of humankind and even of the universe as a whole, until Christ is all in all (see Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:17-23).

Let me repeat: In this body, not everybody can do everything; everyone is specialized in something and contributes to the whole. Christians are specialists: they are knowledgeable in questions about God, they know what believing and praying means, they have heard about the large project, which is referred to as God's Realm or just as nurturing Christ's body. In this context, they can try to spur on targeted impulses, stimulate, encourage, heal, and also criticize and integrate diverging forces. Other people do different things. Everyone matters so that in the end the whole is realized. Muslims play their role as well as the so-called "nones." Networks and connections emerge through marriages that unite different confessions, through family ties that transcend individual religions, and through marriages between religious and nonreligious people. People interact in different cultural domains; some of them brake lest the whole process goes too fast, others accelerate lest

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[74] See with reference to more ecclesiastical documents: "Gott wirkt weiterhin im Volk des alten Bundes" – Eine Antwort der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz auf die Erklärungen aus dem Orthodoxen Judentum zum Verhältnis von Judentum und Katholischer Kirche (Pressemitteilung vom February 13, 2019), https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2019/2019_-020a-Stellungnahme-zu-juedisch-orthodoxen-Erklaerungen.pdf (accessed August 15, 2022).

it comes to a standstill; some gather, others spread. Nobody oversees the whole. But Christians can contribute the trust that this process will succeed, even when the risk of failure and death looms, because they can proclaim the ONE, who works behind and in all this.

(Translated by Paul Silas Peterson and Peter Jonkers)

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Part IV

The Church after the Pandemic

Introductory Note

PAVOL BARGÁR

The Covid-19 pandemic had a major influence on the research project that resulted in the output of this volume. Not only did the project schedule and the format of project activities have to be significantly modified to comply with the pandemic-related restrictions, but, more importantly, the pandemic also raised a number of new issues and questions closely related to the overall theme of this volume. Indeed, the pandemic has had not only economic, social, and political consequences but also a psychological and cultural impact on both individuals and communities. This has confronted believers and nonbelievers alike with many unexpected questions. Many nonbelievers began asking questions about meaning. The faith of believers faced a test of doubts. What does this all mean for the dialogue between people of faith and those without?

As part of the research project, a conference was organized for Czech participants, exploring how churches responded to the pandemic – theologically, liturgically, homiletically, pastorally, and practically. This part of the volume brings together four texts that were first presented at this conference.[1]

Tomáš Halík, in his chapter, adopts the "kairological" hermeneutic method of discerning the signs of the times. He is interested in restoring the image of the God who sides with both the suffering and those who are trying to alleviate human suffering. Rather than a disengaged spectator, this God represents a fellow-pilgrim and a source of strength. Halík's text can be read as a call for constant conversion of our own selves.

In her chapter, Ivana Noble reflects on the nature of experience as the intertwining of interpretation, emotions, and actions related to an event. She challenges the willingness of the Christian church to buy into the commodification of needs that results in a loss of the uniqueness of human beings. Instead of responding to needs, the church should relate to actual people, immersing them more deeply into life. The church, Noble asserts, is to be an icon, witnessing and mediating the fullness of life in God.

Jiří Pavlík focuses on the unpreparedness of the Catholic (Christian) tradition in cases when it is not necessary to fight oppression but to accept temporary oppression out of love for one's neighbor. Using the example of Bruce Lee, he argues that tradition and orthodoxy do not work in situations of "real fights." Rather than keeping orthodox regulations and (thereby) maintaining the status quo, Pavlík calls on Christians to stand primarily in solidarity with the excluded and marginalized.

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[1] The conference was entitled "The Experience of the Pandemic and the Relation Between Faith and Unfaith." It took place on June 15, 2020, in Prague.

Finally, Tomáš Petráček muses on the relevance of the Catholic Church in today's world. Rather than being bent on intelligibility, the Church should instead seek to offer expressions of hope and trust, and facilitate encounters at a deeply human level. Using the example of Pope Francis standing vulnerable yet firm in prayer, Petráček invites Christians to spread the message that we are not to succumb to fear. For crises can become times of silence and introspection as well as for new opportunities.

Christianity in a Time of Sickness

Tomáš Halík

Our world is sick. I am not just referring to the Covid-19 virus pandemic, but also to the state of our civilization as revealed in this global phenomenon. It is, in biblical terms, a sign of the times.

At the beginning of the unusual period of Lent during the 2020 and 2021 lockdowns, many of us thought that the pandemic would cause a short-term blackout, or a breakdown in the usual operation of society, which we could ride out somehow and then things would soon return back to normal. It did not. And it would not have turned out well if they had. After this global experience, the world is not the same as it was before, and it probably should not be.

At times of major calamities, it is natural that we first concern ourselves with the material necessities for survival; but "one does not live by bread alone." The time has come to examine the deeper implications of this blow to the security of our world. The unavoidable process of globalization seems to have peaked: the global vulnerability of a global world is now plain to see.

The Church as a Field Hospital

What kind of challenge does this situation represent for Christianity and the Church – one of the first global players – and for theology?

Pope Francis proposed that the Church should be a field hospital. By this metaphor, he means that the Church should not remain in splendid isolation from the world, but should break free of its boundaries and give help wherever people are physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually afflicted. Indeed, this is how the Church can do penance for the wounds inflicted by its representatives quite recently on the most defenseless. Let us try to think more deeply about this metaphor and put it into practice.

If the Church is to be a hospital, it must, of course, offer the health, social, and charitable care it has offered since the dawn of its history. In order to be a good hospital, the Church must also fulfil other tasks. In this respect, it has various roles to play: a diagnostic role (identifying the signs of the times), a preventive role (creating an immune system in a society in which the malignant viruses of fear, hatred, populism, and nationalism are rife), and a convalescent role (overcoming the traumas of the past by forgiveness).

Empty Churches as a Sign and a Challenge

Just before Easter in 2019, the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris burned down. In 2020, during Lent, there were no services in hundreds of thousands of churches (or in synagogues and mosques) on all the continents due to the pandemic. As a priest and a theologian, I reflect on the empty or closed churches as a sign and challenge from God.

Understanding the language of God in the events of our world requires the art of spiritual discernment, which, in turn, calls for contemplative detachment from our heightened emotions and prejudices, as well as from the projections of our fears and desires. At moments of disaster, the sleeping agents of a wicked, vengeful God spread fear, and make religious capital out of it for themselves. Their vision of God has been grist to the mill of atheism for centuries.

At times of disaster, I do not see God as an ill-tempered director, sitting comfortably backstage as the events of our world play out. Instead, I look at God as a source of strength, operating in those who show solidarity and self-sacrificing love in such situations – yes, including those who have no religious motivation for their actions. God is humble and discreet love.

But I cannot help wondering whether the occasion of empty and closed churches is not some kind of cautionary vision of what might happen in the fairly near future: this is what things could look like in a few years' time in a large part of our world. Have we not already had plenty of warning from the developments in many countries where more and more churches, monasteries, and priestly seminaries have been emptying and closing? Why have we been ascribing this development for so long to outside influences (e.g., the secularist tsunami), instead of realizing that another chapter in the history of Christianity is coming to a close and it is time to prepare for a new one.

Maybe this time of empty church buildings symbolically exposes the churches' hidden emptiness and their possible future unless they make a serious attempt to show the world a completely different face of Christianity. We have thought too much about converting the world (the rest), and less about converting ourselves – i.e., not simply improvement, but a radical change from a static state of being Christians to a dynamic state of becoming Christians.

When the medieval Church made excessive use of the interdict as a penalty, and those general strikes by the entire ecclesiastical machinery meant that church services were not held and sacraments were not administered, people increasingly started to seek a personal relationship with God, a naked faith. Lay fraternities and mysticism proliferated. That upsurge of mysticism definitely helped pave the way for the Reformation – not only Luther's and Calvin's but also the Catholic reformation connected with the Jesuits and Spanish mysticism. Perhaps the discovery of contemplation could help complement the synodal path to a new reforming council.

A Call for Reform

Maybe we should accept the recent abstinence from religious services, and the operation of the Church as kairos, *as an opportunity to stop and engage in thorough reflection before God and with God.* I am convinced the time has come to reflect on how to continue the path of reform, which Pope Francis says is necessary. Such a path does not attempt to return to a world that no longer exists, or to rely just on external structural reforms; instead, it is a shift towards the heart of the Gospel, a journey into the depths.

I cannot see how a quick fix in the form of artificial substitutes, such as the broadcasting of masses, is a good solution at times when public worship is banned or unavailable, for whatever reason. A shift to virtual piety, remote communion, and kneeling in front of a TV or computer screen is truly something odd. Perhaps we should, instead, test the truth of Jesus's words during such times: "Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

Furthermore, do we really think we can solve the lack of priests in Europe by importing spare parts for the Church's machinery from seemingly bottomless storehouses in Poland, Asia, and Africa? Of course, we must take seriously the proposals of the Amazonian synod but, at the same time, we need to provide greater scope for the ministry of laypeople in the Church; let us not forget that in many territories, the Church survived without clergy for many centuries.

Perhaps this state of emergency is an indicator of the new face of the Church, for which there is a historical precedent. I am convinced that our Christian communities, parishes, congregations, church movements, and monastic communities should seek to draw closer to the ideal that gave rise to the European universities: a community of pupils and teachers, a school of wisdom, in which truth is sought through free disputation and also profound contemplation. Such islands of spirituality and dialogue could be the source of a healing force for a sick world. The day before the 2013 papal election, Cardinal Bergoglio quoted a passage from Revelation in which Jesus stands before the door and knocks. He added: "Today Christ is knocking *from inside the Church* and wants to get out." Maybe that is exactly what he did.

Where Is the Galilee of Today?

For years I have pondered the well-known text by Friedrich Nietzsche about the "madman" (the fool who alone is permitted to speak the truth) who proclaims "the death of God." The relevant chapter ends with the madman going to church to sing *Requiem aeternam deo* and asking: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?" I must admit that, for a long time, various forms of the Church seemed to me like cold and opulent sepulchers of a dead god.

In 2020, many of our churches were empty at Easter. We read the Gospel passages about the empty tomb somewhere other than in a church. If the

emptiness of the churches is reminiscent of the empty tomb, let us not ignore the voice from above: "He is not here. He has risen. He has gone ahead of you to Galilee." A question to stimulate meditation on that strange Easter is: *Where is the Galilee of today, and where can we encounter the living Christ?*

Sociological research indicates that, in the world today, the number of dwellers (both those who fully identify with the traditional form of religion, and those who assert a dogmatic atheism) is decreasing, while there is an increase in the number of seekers. In addition, of course, there is a rise in the number of apatheists – people who could not care less about religious issues or the traditional response to them.

The main dividing line is no longer between those who consider themselves believers and those who consider themselves nonbelievers. There are seekers among believers (those for whom faith is not a legacy but a way), and among nonbelievers who reject the religious notions put forward to them by those around them but nevertheless have a yearning for something to satisfy their thirst for meaning. I am convinced that the *Galilee of today – where we must seek God who has survived death – is among the world of the seekers.*

Seeking Christ among Seekers

Liberation Theology has taught us to seek Christ among people on the fringes of society. However, it is also necessary to seek Him among people marginalized within the Church, among those who do not follow us. If we want to connect with them as Jesus' disciples, there are many things we must first abandon.

We must abandon many of our former notions about Christ. The Resurrected One is radically transformed by the experience of death. As we read in the Gospels, even Christ's nearest and dearest did not recognize Him. We do not have to accept the news that surrounds us at all. We can persist in wanting to touch his wounds. After all, where else will we be sure to encounter them other than in the wounds of the world, the wounds of the Church, and the wounds of the body that Christ took on himself?

We must abandon our proselytizing aims. We are not entering the world of the seekers to convert them as quickly as possible and squeeze them into the existing institutional and mental confines of our churches. Jesus did not try to force those "lost sheep of the house of Israel" back into the structures of the Judaism of his day. He knew that new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

We need to take new and old things from the treasure house of tradition with which we have been entrusted and make them part of a dialogue with seekers – a dialogue where we can and should learn from each other. We must learn to broaden radically the boundaries of our understanding of the Church. It is no longer enough for us to magnanimously open a court of the gentiles. The Lord has already knocked from within and come out; it is our job to seek Him and follow Him. Christ has passed through the door, which we had

locked out of fear of others. He has passed through the wall with which we had surrounded ourselves. He has opened up a space whose breadth and depth has made us dizzy.

On the very threshold of its history, the Early Church of Jews and pagans experienced the destruction of the temple in which Jesus prayed and taught his disciples. The Jews of those days found a courageous and creative solution: they replaced the altar of the demolished temple with the Jewish family table, and the practice of sacrifice with the practice of private and communal prayer. They replaced burnt offerings and blood sacrifices with lip sacrifice: reflection, praise, and study of Scripture. Around the same time, Early Christianity, banished from the synagogue, sought a new identity of its own. On the ruins of traditions, Jews and Christians learnt anew to read the Law and the prophets and interpret them afresh. Are we not in a similar situation in our current times?

God in All Things

When Rome fell at the threshold of the fifth century, immediate explanations arose from many quarters: the pagans saw it as punishment from the gods for the adoption of Christianity, while the Christians saw it as God's punishment on Rome for continuing to be the whore of Babylon. St. Augustine rejected both of these interpretations. At that watershed moment, he developed his theology of the age-old battle between two opposing cities – not of Christians and pagans, but of two loves dwelling in the human heart: the love of self, closed to transcendence (*amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei*), and love that gives of itself and thereby finds God (*amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui*). Does this time of civilizational change not call for a new theology of contemporary history and a new understanding of the Church?

"We know where the church is, but we don't know where she isn't," taught the Orthodox theologian Evdokimov. Maybe what the last Council said about catholicity and ecumenism needs to acquire a deeper content. It is time for a broader and deeper ecumenism, for a bolder search for God in all things.

We can, of course, accept that the Lent of empty and silent churches was simply a brief, temporary measure soon to be forgotten. But we can also embrace it as *kairo*s – an opportune moment to put into deeper water *and seek a new identity for Christianity in a world which is being radically transformed before our eyes*. The pandemic was and is certainly not the only global threat facing our world now and in the future.

Let us embrace the next Eastertide as a challenge to seek Christ anew. Let us not seek the Living among the dead. Let us seek Him boldly and tenaciously, and let us not be taken aback if he appears to us as a foreigner. We will recognize Him by his wounds, by his voice when he speaks to us intimately, and by the Spirit that brings peace and banishes fear.

The Church with the Common Experience of the Pandemic?

IVANA NOBLE

In this article, I will explore the question of the role the experience of the pandemic plays and can play for the church as a whole, and for individual churches in which this people live. I will first seek to offer a methodological reflection on what constitutes experience. Then I will outline several important moments that the period of life with closed church buildings has revealed, as if under a magnifying glass. These moments are related to spiritual practice, theological orientation, and ecclesio-political beliefs. However, it is not clear whether they were perceived by all, and whether all perceived them in the same way, which is what leads me to reflect on the notion of experience.

Do We Have Common Experience?

I prefer the dynamic understanding of experience, introduced by Franz Brentano in the late 1800s. He maintained that not every event is experience. One could argue that even though the global world – including Christianity – has gone through common events during the pandemic, this does not necessarily mean that all had the same experience. Experience includes understanding and, as Brentano asserts, also the movement of will and emotions. Getting insight into something, taking a stand, engaging in action – these do not happen immediately. Furthermore, each comprehensive understanding develops and undergoes changes. In Brentano's words, events are present at the level of our consciousness in three different ways.

The first way is presentation. This takes us, via Edmund Husserl, to Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, being there, which refers to our being thrown into a situation. This thrownness is what Christians, churches, health workers, politicians, believers and nonbelievers, the healthy and the sick, the helping and the self-interested have had in common since the beginning of the pandemic. However, this does not mean that they have experienced, let alone understood, the whole event together. At the level of presentation, according to Brentano, the question of truth does not even appear yet. Instead of in a post-truth society, we therefore find ourselves in a pre-truth state, which discloses completely different opportunities than the self-deluded relativism that is convinced to be done with truth once and for all. This problem, too, was displayed as if under a magnifying glass in societies and churches, with some coming to a new understanding based on this presentation.

The second way, which follows presentation either immediately or at a distance, is, according to Brentano, judgment. Today, we would probably turn to more elaborated theories of interpretation. David Tracy revisits the ques-

tion of meaning and truth when he says that although we can view events from many different perspectives, there are things that appear again and again in every good interpretation. In other words, not every judgment is right, not every interpretation is good, but those that are good have something in common. Teilhard de Chardin asserted something similar when he said that whatever transcends itself also converges at a certain moment. However, convergence does not simply represent one theory of interpretation, like veracity. Similarly, it is not that we would, in our interpretation, finally grasp, through a perfect conceptual system, something that we have presented. One needs to return to presentation again and again – both when one has made an evident error in interpretation and when there is no such error (or, at least, no error that one would be aware of). I believe that if we work with the first state of pre-truthfulness to a greater extent, we will have less need for post-truth – perhaps with the exception of overt manipulators for whom post-truth represents part and parcel of their program.

The third level of experience, for Brentano, is the movement of will and emotions. Here, pleasure or resentment, love, fear, or contempt are inter-twined with the will to act. Although Brentano did not manage to find a single satisfactory term for this completion of experience, his intuition told him that understanding, to be authentic, is not self-enclosed or reduced to human reason. Rather, it involves the whole human being with his or her virtues and relationships. If we ask what the church and churches can learn from the experience of the pandemic, I think that employing a more comprehensive concept of experience can be useful.

If I follow Brentano's understanding of experience, I must begin with a fundamental problem: if I want to discuss the first and constituent level of the experience of the church and church (buildings) during the pandemic, I must integrate the next two levels right from the outset. My speaking is an act as it includes the movement of will and emotions. And each attempt to grasp it conceptually already involves a decision regarding my choice of words to describe the event. If I stop at a chain of events from the pandemic period that I consider to be significant, both interpretations of and emotions and actions inspired by these events cannot be separated from one another. I think that it is helpful for us to know that the respective levels of the experience are mutually irreducible. The moments in life with closed churches that I would like to briefly consider are the following: the way the state relates to churches and their representatives; the way the society relates to the values and needs that people associate with churches; spiritual and theological competences across churches; and the relationship to the virtual and physical realities that illuminates the importance of the church as an icon.

The State Relating to Churches and Their Representatives

The closing of churches that took place in the vast majority of countries around the world at the beginning of the pandemic disclosed a pattern of pow-

er relations: the state dictates the rules that the churches must follow (or, at best, they can moderately negotiate the specific forms of these rules). In the Czech Republic and other post-communist countries, this *modus vivendi* reminded the believers of the era of communism. However, there was a difference in the reason for making such a radical decision. The emergence of an unknown infectious disease, hardly detectable in some people and lethal for others, justified the state of emergency and the restrictions of human rights, including religious liberties. The memories of totalitarian regimes were not a matter exclusively of the past. Why? The pandemic hit the world in a period when totalitarian thinking was on the rise and populist governments benefitted from the crisis of democracy. It was, therefore, more difficult to trust the governmental measures and restrictions of human rights, to believe that governments would not abuse the situation for their own political and economic interests, seeking to silence the dissenting voices, including those from the churches. However, it was necessary to become united in our efforts, while being alert to any different efforts that might possibly have appeared.

In this context, certain forms of representation of church leaders kept on reappearing. In the media, their role was frequently reduced to negotiations about the conditions under which churches could reopen. As far as the state was concerned, churches and their representatives were not important partners in the decision-making process regarding how best to get through the pandemic. Unlike during the communist period, however, they did not pose any threat to state politics. Due to their negligible involvement, the state could easily afford to overlook them and their closed churches. This did not mean that religious questions and rhetoric disappeared from the political scene during the global pandemic. In the massive confrontation with a vague threat, death, the absence of scientific knowledge, a failure of healthcare and social service systems in countries we had considered to be developed and were not so far from us, there even appeared the need for prayer, hope, and relating to someone other than ourselves. Religious themes even appeared in the speeches of the Czech prime minister, Andrej Babiš. Yet, it is hard to judge whether this was his own authentic reflection on the fact that he, too, had to face death, or whether it was merely a utilitarian exploitation of the topic. Perhaps it was both. Be that as it may, even if we put aside the question of how this need could have been exploited populistically, another question is relevant for our reflection, namely: why did the government representatives seek to address this need only by themselves, without inviting churches and their representatives to join the process?

The Society Relating to the Values and Needs That People Associate with Churches

During the pandemic, I collaborated with people from various media and centers who released information on, among other things, theological faculties and their activities. I was surprised by an admittedly well-intended at-

tempt to include the theological faculties among the institutions providing consolation for elderly people. During one conversation on this topic, I could not help recalling the image of religion as a crutch for the weak whom life would otherwise treat badly, or as the opium that had once been administered as a sedative to alleviate pain and help forget the cruel reality of life. It was noteworthy that the people formulating these ideas did not live during the communist regime even as children. Does this mean, once again, that the "return of religion," or at least of "religiosity" that was such a common expression in the late 1990s, has come to an end? Is the pendulum going to swing toward the opposite pole now? I have no sociological data available to allow me to go beyond merely asking these questions. But the questions keep coming back.

Moreover, we are faced with these questions in the situation when we encounter everywhere the utilitarian attitude of our society. Prosperity sets the tone not only because it serves as the benchmark for other values but also because everything that is worthy of attention in the life of a society can be measured as a value through the lens of prosperity. In a certain sense, values can thus be commodified. Running the risk of oversimplification, the basic pattern can be introduced as follows: when people have needs (including spiritual needs), values determine the exchange rate according to which these needs are to be fulfilled.

During the pandemic, churches found themselves in a situation where, despite their inferior political standing, numerous people, both believers and nonbelievers, expected them to provide help or, at least, inspiration for seeking and finding a direction in life and ways as far as possible to adequately get a grip on and survive these strange times. Although reducing the situations in which these things happened to spiritual needs and to fulfilling those needs might have made the churches more intelligible for people with a utilitarian mindset, the price was too high. The reason is that such a reduction of a multi-dimensional desire and its pursuit to a definable need presupposes certain hermeneutical violence because it requires fitting all that one is presented with into a single, ready-made, and comprehensible pigeon-hole, and cutting off all that is incompatible or adding something else that did not actually appear in the presentation so that the pigeon-hole is filled up accurately. Rather than responding to a human being, this approach means responding to a need. When a catechesis, prayer, or blessing aims at fulfilling needs, churches lose their own competences and become incompetent. To put it differently, they inadequately respond to the situation they find themselves in. This does not mean that there is no adequate way of communication that can facilitate people talking about their needs and, together, seeking and finding what could be of help for them. There are also ways when people recognize that they have received something they really needed, albeit without being able to name and identify their need. If theology and ecclesial practice are competent, they must care about human needs in a concrete time and situation – knowing that they must relate to people rather than to needs.

Spiritual and Theological Competences across Churches

One could also observe a whole array of competent responses during the pandemic. Many of my students appreciated the invitation to a regular evening prayer. It did not matter whether it was a Roman Catholic invitation to the 8:00 p.m. intercessory prayer or an Orthodox invitation to the 9:00 p.m. Jesus Prayer. Both invitations were accepted by people from various traditions. They appreciated the experience of belonging and being reminded that it is through prayer that people in diverse situations, time zones, cultures, and religions carry each other on their way with and toward God. It was more than once that I heard people saying, "Why did I actually stop doing this before?" It reminded me of a scene in the famous Czech fairytale film, *The Proud Princess*, when the king asks: "Why did I ban singing?" Competent ecclesial inputs to the territory of prayer drew from the mystical tradition of the church, providing the people who cared for it not only with impulses, for example, by way of daily meditations, but also with conversations or structured forms of spiritual accompaniment. In many cases, denominational, Christian, or other affiliations did not play any role other than simply setting a context in which people found themselves and which illuminated what symbolic systems they might understand and, to the contrary, which would likely be alien for them. Here, the churchliness of competent accompaniment in prayer lay in opening opportunities for drawing energy and inspiration from a long, rich, and living tradition that includes both contemporary believers and contemporary seekers. It was encouraging to see both the unity and the diversity of various good forms of accompaniment, which did not follow denominational borderlines. For instance, my friend from the Czechoslovak Hussite Church told me that she did not think it was a good idea to put her own sermons or reflections on the internet when she could simply direct people to the Carmelite website Fortna, which featured top-quality Catholic preachers as part of its talk-series, *U ambonu* (At the ambon).[1] Instead, she used her time for conversations with people over the phone and, when possible again, in person – with Hussites, Catholics, Protestants, seekers, and others.

Another important moment that showed the spiritual and theological competence of many people actually represented the unwillingness to reduce their mission to providing consolation. Having said this, I do not mean to claim that consolation was not needed. Rather, it should never come without transformation. Christian theology, both liturgical and ascetic, at its best, helps people, individually and collectively, find God by immersing them more deeply into their own life, helps them live their lives more authentically, and helps them learn to discern – through this life and all its experiments – what nourishes life and what deforms and destroys it. Long before the modern and postmodern eras, our traditions took seriously the fact that humans were both ritual and mimetic beings; that the ritual can sustain people, mediating

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[1] See https://www.fortna.eu/uambonu.

transcendence and a common meaning more holistically than any explanation or shared rules; that the ritual can stand not only between the divine and human realities but also between the demonic and human realities. One enters into the ritual by learning to imitate what people have in common and to be able to find a space for relationships that are unique – the relationships with God, other people, and the earth with all its creatures.

The pandemic prevented most Christians from participating in regular rituals. There were no public Sunday worship services; Christians had to cope with undesirable Eucharistic fasting; it was difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to receive the sacrament of penance, not even during Easter (2020); catechumens could not be baptized. Responses to this situation by ordained and lay Christians differed, again, across church traditions. In addition to the efforts to transpose as much of the usual business as possible into a virtual form, there were also other, more creative instances of responsible and erudite experimenting with rituals. For example, Maundy Thursday, when the Last Supper is commemorated, was, in many households, associated with a Christian alternative to the Seder meal. Families, and sometimes friends, met in allowed small groups for the service of the Word connected with a meal, blessings, and the sharing of food and a cup. While they did not seek to replace the Eucharist, they actually experienced something that establishes the Eucharist at its core. Some had already encountered this practice in monasteries, for example, in the community of Grandchamp, which adopted this custom from environments where Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived together. Others were introduced to it indirectly.

Needless to say, other and older questions and forms of sharing returned in new expressions. The Orthodox, more than any other Christians, asked whether the church can exist at all if it does not celebrate the Eucharist. For some, this question was connected with existential anxiety; for others, with a protest against the restrictions. However, I could also see efforts to accept that the liturgy was being celebrated somewhere, and the local priest who was not allowed to celebrate it here and now could participate in this celebration, for example, by being available during the time of liturgy to anyone who might pass along the church doors and be interested in a conversation – with face masks on, of course. This leads to a question of how to evaluate the initiatives of some Orthodox priests and communities who attempted to disobey the bans and find some minimalist way for believers to access the liturgy and sacraments, even at the cost of a possible – and mostly actual – confrontation with the police. If we were to evaluate the situation through the lens of a culturally conditioned conflict of values that eventually led to spiritual needs (the liturgy) being given preference over physical needs (measures to protect the health of people), we would only get a 2D image of the reality. There would be concrete people missing in this image, with their complex experiences at all three levels distinguished in Brentano's analysis of experience: presentation, judgment, and the movement of will and emotions.

In the Roman Catholic Church, and also in the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, the question returned

whether vicarious celebration and reception could have viable forms. Again, an alternative emerged in all three of these traditions, considering whether it might be helpful for the ordained minister to eucharistically fast in solidarity with the laypeople. Although many people had good experiences, which, at the first sight, appear to be contradictory, there might be something in these experiences that belongs to the good interpretation of common events. This something is symbolic in nature. It means that we can say something but not everything about it. When speaking about this something, each one of us does so in a somewhat different way. Good speech leads us to a further something as a kind of living center in which we participate together. One can say that none of these good forms of celebration was individualistic, even though some of them might have taken place in solitude. They were not aimed at gaining spiritual advantages over others. Rather, they sought to possibly include everyone and everything in the memory, prayer, and benediction, again, without telling God what exactly this benediction should be for particular individuals and communities. None of the good forms of fasting led to idleness or resignation. Rather, they led to increased alertness enabling that which was to speak through that which was not. The reduction to such a minor local level that even two or three could not physically gather, and that one had to be on one's own, was connected with a robust global awareness that, in this solitude, we were together even with those most distant to us. A great distance sometimes meant great nearness.

The Relationship to the Virtual and Physical Realities:
The Church as an Icon

The virtual mediation of spiritual life has opened venues for new opportunities – and new questions. The first of them concerned what can be seen as an icon of the church. In the world of IT, the term icon refers to an image that one can click on to open a program that the image symbolizes. During the pandemic, the volume of online religious production rapidly increased, although the quality differed. Church leadership and local ministers and preachers tried to compensate for the closed churches by giving believers an opportunity to participate in usual activities online – without their physical presence. Technically, it was possible. However, the concept of the church as icon was also defined in the framework of the IT world. A whole number of additional initiatives emerged in this period: sermons and talks, worship services, prayers, adorations, etc., which people could enter by simply clicking on a respective icon. These initiatives included good things as well as religious pathologies. If one did not belong to the groups that predated this virtual boom, one had no tools other than one's subjective taste to distinguish quality from trash. Seekers who came across, for example, the ideas of a judging God who allegedly used Covid-19 to punish the world for secularization, same-sex marriage, or abortion did not necessarily get access to other icons, which would have provided a critique of such distorted images of God. I regard this

absence of common discernment to be as significant as other realities that pointed to the limits of the virtual sharing of spiritual life. People missed physical contact and physical communion; the symbolic profundity of two or three gathering in Christ's name could not be automatically transposed to its fullest extent.

The broadening of the idea of the church as an icon to include a more original concept than the one we know from computer screens is not satisfied with the automatized transposition of a part of the visible life of churches, religious activists, and fanatics. In Eastern Christianity, icons belong to the liturgical space; they represent windows to heaven. Their purpose is to witness and mediate the fullness of life in God. Their witness and mediation very intensely work with physical reality – wood, paints, character typologies, gestures, inverted perspectives. We could glimpse some of these in those more creative attempts during the pandemic that sought to address liturgical celebration or liturgical fasting, prayers, and rituals, including simple expressions of thanks to physicians, paramedics, and social workers by clapping from people's windows. These expressions involved physical reality and restrictions thereof. Regardless of whether it involved the communities that gathered in small numbers and prayed behind closed doors, families or individuals, this original iconic nature of their spiritual life worked with whatever was physically available: families spent more time together, many people favored time in nature, and spiritual life often had to be simplified as a result of a radically increased volume of work, in which one relied on being carried by the prayers of others. Indeed, the online space could play a supporting role. Some people appreciated the moments when they could, after a shift of home schooling and home office, listen to a passage from Meister Eckhart or a good sermon while cooking. Was this consumerism or inspiration? The pandemic provided a magnifying lens to display a simple truth: the same thing can mean something diametrically opposite for people with different mindsets. Online productions have provided an opportunity for a greater degree of both consumption and inspiration. As for the church, its forms of life, and the persons who iconically represent these forms, an Orthodox saying applies: an icon should not obstruct a prayer; on the contrary, a good icon enables a prayer, and an excellent icon teaches one how to pray.

Conclusion

The events during the pandemic presented the church with such a great experiment that it could never have otherwise realized by itself. Learning how to understand not only these events but also a whole array of their interpretations, the emotions related therewith, and the forms of practical and ritual behavior can immensely help Christians and churches to gain better insight into their own place in today's world and into the core that nourishes the life of their faith and practice.

Reflections on the Church in the Pandemic[1]

Jiří Pavlík

Christianity, having weathered historical adversity, persecution, and state oppression, is well-equipped to face external challenges. Its theology of martyrdom has fortified the faith of Christians, empowering them even to sacrifice themselves. Despite this resilience – or maybe just because of it – the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a new crisis in the life of the Church. In fact, the onset of the pandemic was not a threatening event comparable to local persecutions or to the existential threats, faced by local communities, yet it brought significant challenges. The most challenging was the unusualness of the situation. The citizens of democratic countries and their local churches have, throughout history, laboriously achieved recognition of their freedom of religion and freedom of worship. With the pandemic, a new situation arose and unheard restrictions on these freedoms occurred. However, this curtailment has not been dictated by the harassment of a hostile state apparatus but, rather, by the worry of a caring state apparatus for the fragility of its members and its desire to relieve overloaded health care systems.[2]

The restriction of religious freedom on the grounds of the pandemic became the subject of legitimate juridical debates in various countries, addressing both the proportionality of the measures to the level of threat and the balance of the restriction of religious freedom against the restrictions of other constitutional freedoms.[3] However, the legal aspect is not the focus of this paper because it does not concern the relationship between church and state. Rather, this paper deals with the theological implications of life in lockdown and touches on the relations between the Church and individual Christians. I

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[1] This contribution is a revised paper from the colloquium, "Experience of the Pandemic and the Relationship Between Belief and Nonbelief" held on June 15, 2020 at the Czech Christian Academy in the Emmaus Monastery in Prague, Czech Republic. Its original version was published twice: Jiří Pavlík, "Církev v karanténě," *Universum: Revue České křesťanské akademie* 3 (2020): 16-17, and "Církev po pandemii," *Křesťanská revue* 87, no. 3 (2020): 10-13.

[2] For analyses of and reflections on the pandemic measures reducing religious freedom, see, e.g., Pierluigi Consorti, ed., *Law, Religion, and Covid-19 Emergency* (Pisa: DiReSoM Papers 1, 2020) or Javier Martínez-Torrón, "COVID-19 and Religious Freedom: Some Comparative Perspectives," *Laws* 10, no. 2 (2021): 39, https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10020039.

[3] There are many papers dealing with this juridical matter, e.g., Caroline Mala Corbin, "Religious Liberty in a Pandemic," *Duke Law Journal Online* 70, no. 1 (2020), https://dlj.law.duke.edu/2020/09/religiouspandemic/ (accessed June 20, 2022); Pierluigi Consorti, "La libertà religiosa travolta dall'emergenza," *Forum di Quaderni Costituzionali* 2 (2020): 370-388, https://www.forumcostituzionale.it/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/26-Consorti-FQC-2-20.pdf (accessed June 20, 2022).

will proceed mainly from my personal experience as a lay Catholic during the pandemic and reflect on how the pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of contemporary theology and practice. In my opinion, the situation revealed the unpreparedness of the Catholic tradition in cases where it is not necessary to fight oppression but to accept temporary oppression out of love for one's neighbor.

Dysfunctional Tradition and Failing Orthodoxy

Given that I am writing from personal experience of the pandemic, and in so far as the pandemic gave us ample opportunities to spend much time watching films and TV series, I cannot help but give this subject a pop-cultural framework. After all, we enjoy theorizing by intertwining the virtual, physical, and other realities. So why hold back?

Quentin Tarantino's 2019 film "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood," which is actually a meta-film and his last movie to the date, featured a combat scene with the fictional character of stunt man Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt) fighting Bruce Lee (it was he who defeated Chuck Norris in the 1972 film "Return of the Dragon"). In Tarantino's film, Cliff provoked the fight by voicing his doubt about whether Bruce Lee had ever fought for real. The fight ended in a tie, evoking disputes and questions about what the situation really was with Bruce Lee. Thanks to this, I was caught by an article on the ESPN website entitled, "Could Bruce Lee Win a Real Fight?" which addressed this cinematographic combat.[4] What was the case with Bruce Lee then?

In 1958, in Hong Kong, where he studied under a master of the Wing Chun kung fu style, Bruce Lee (aged 18) took on Gary Elms, a city boxing champion in his weight division for the previous three years. The Western boxing match ended after three rounds with Bruce knocking Elms down in each round. Three years later (1961), in Seattle, WA, Bruce Lee was challenged by Yoichi Nakachi, the local Shinpu-Ren karate master. The fight ended after a mere eleven seconds, with Nakachi down on the floor with a skull fracture. Another three years later (1964), a fight was arranged in Bruce Lee's training studio in Oakland, CA, between Bruce and Wong Jack Man, a kung fu master of the same age and a fellow émigré from Hong Kong, who felt outraged by Bruce's unflattering public remarks about traditional kung fu. The duel ended in three minutes with Bruce's victory – though there are still ongoing disputes about this fight.[5]

These are Bruce Lee's documented real fights before he became a movie star. Even though he mostly and crushingly won all of them, these fights led him to question the meaning of the orthodox kung fu style because the

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[4] Dotun Akintoye, "Could Bruce Lee Win a Real Fight?" *ESPN*, June 6, 2020, https://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/29266542/could-bruce-lee-win-real-fight (accessed June 20, 2022).

[5] As reported by Akintoye, "Could Bruce Lee Win a Real Fight?"

techniques themselves were of no use to him in real fights. Matthew Polly, Bruce Lee's biographer,[6] summarized Lee's deliberations reportedly as follows:

> In the old days, you'd do what your teacher tells you, because it's a 500-year tradition and you're supposed to keep the tradition going. Lee was the first person to come out and explicitly say [in a public lecture he held after an exhibition in Oakland], 'Traditions and styles are stupid. All that matters is what works for you.' And people hated him for it at the time. It wasn't an easy position to take.[7]

Nevertheless, thanks to his approach, many MMA fighters today see him as the founding father of their discipline. They adore him and quote some of his statements.[8] One of these is: "Be water, my friend," drawing on his most famous line: "If you try to remember you will lose. Empty your mind. Be formless, shapeless, like water. Now, you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup; put it into a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow or creep or drip or crash! Be water, my friend."[9]

The Church in an Unusual Situation

Traditions and orthodoxy are dysfunctional when facing real fights. They fail because they prevent life from being like water, filling newly vacant spaces swiftly and intuitively. This brings us back to the Church during the pandemic. What did the ban on public worship services tell us about the Church today? What happened to Christianity while churches were closed? Did it adaptively become like a cup, or did it constrainedly insist on remaining like a bottle? It is a sociologist's job to answer this question, and I would be interested in quantitative research on how Christianity coped with this situation. The results of such research would be good to know because it could provide the most accurate report on the current condition of the Church.

Watching what went on with Church life, I noted that some clergy members exhibited fear and felt their positions threatened. I observed a struggle to prevent the Church from becoming a cup thereby forcing it to remain a bottle instead. Rather than withdrawing and reflecting on the new situation, many Church ministers sought to fight their way into the private space of closed households via TV or online broadcasts of worship services, or by window-administering the Eucharist for immediate use or home supplies. I

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[6] Matthew Polly, *Bruce Lee. A Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

[7] As Akintoye refers from an unspecified interview with Polly in his "Could Bruce Lee Win a Real Fight?"

[8] See Akintoye, "Could Bruce Lee Win a Real Fight?"

[9] Polly, *Bruce Lee. A Life*, 285.

found this all to be partly ridiculous, and partly distasteful. I will explain why in my conclusion.

We also heard the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issue decrees on celebrating the Easter Triduum liturgy in the given situation,[10] as if the end of the world could not come without their regulations. I felt this was embarrassing, too. It was as if they were trying to signal that Catholics were the most wretched people, being bound by rules and tormented by artificial spiritual needs that could not be well satisfied in the situation of closed churches. The implication was that Catholics experienced more discomfort and needed more intensive care than the ordinary (non)believer.

Few clergymen offered anything from the centuries-old Church tradition that could be relevant to everyone. Bill Grimm, a missionary in Tokyo, remarked[11] that *The New York Times* and a Japanese newspaper published articles where American and Japanese astronauts, who had spent months in orbit, gave practical advice to people on how to live in home confinement and find solutions to stressful situations. These secular dailies took on the role of spiritual guides, which the Church failed to fill, leading people to a simple life and self-control. Grimm asked: Where are monks and hermits? Where are Church leaders offering the experience these Christian masters of social distancing have acquired over the millennia? When the next crisis hits, is it, again, going to be astronauts who provide a message of hope and spiritual guidance? Such provocative questions Grimm asks.

An Opportunity to See the Catholic Condition More Clearly

The lockdown was an opportunity for many Catholics to observe the condition of Catholicism from outside. One of the most protected and fundamental doctrines in the Catholic Church is the doctrine of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is regarded as an essential means of Christian life, without which there would be no Church. Much has been written on this topic. To give but one example, Benedict XVI wrote in his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, "Sacramentum Caritatis:"

> The Church 'draws her life from the Eucharist'. Since the Eucharist makes present Christ's redeeming sacrifice, we must start by acknowledging that 'there is a causal influence of the Eucharist at the

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[10] Robert Sarah, "Decreto della Congregazione per il Culto Divino e la Disciplina dei Sacramenti, 'In tempo di Covid-19 (II)'," March 25, 2020, https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/25/ 0181/00409.html (accessed June 20, 2022).

[11] William Grimm, "Help from on High," *La croix international*, May 22, 2020, https://international.la-croix.com/news/help-from-on-high/12424 (accessed June 20, 2022).

> Church's very origins'. The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body. Hence, in the striking interplay between the Eucharist which builds up the Church, and the Church herself which 'makes' the Eucharist, the primary causality is expressed in the first formula: the Church is able to celebrate and adore the mystery of Christ present in the Eucharist precisely because Christ first gave himself to her in the sacrifice of the Cross. The Church's ability to 'make' the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ's self-gift to her.[12]

This discourse seems to be theological, but it is also political in so far as it confirms the *status quo* of the power division in the Church. The Eucharist is not only the foundation for the Church's life and the spiritual nutrition of any Catholic believer. It is also the constitutive principle of the sharpest hierarchy in the Catholic Church, dividing it into those who are allowed to celebrate the Eucharist and those who are not. Only some specialists are entitled to celebrate the Eucharist and singled out for this purpose by a life-long ordination (and, of course, they must be male and, in most cases, celibate, but this is a topic for another discussion).

This specialization constitutes a unique, irreplaceable caste within the Church that claims the exclusive right to formulate orthodoxy, discipline, and morality and so can secure an unwavering position for itself by enforcing a doctrine about the central role of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. This arrangement is a systemic problem and is at the core of clericalism, at least in its Catholic version (also a topic for another discussion). During the time when public worship services were banned, this specialization – robustly asserted by doctrine and carefully guarded through power structures – led laypeople to helplessness. It forced them to believe that the impossibility of attending the Mass cut them off from Christ as well as the Church that the Eucharist is meant to establish and realize.

During the lockdowns, this disproportionate emphasis on the Eucharist as an irreplaceable center of the Catholic believer's spiritual life caused trouble. It resulted in an unspoken agreement among the clergy and most of the laity that the essential mission of the clergy is to provide lay Catholics access to this magical sacrament at any cost. The means to pursue this task were many: the virtualization of worship services and the promotion of a controversial doctrine of spiritual communion or the window-administering of the Eucharist as a sort of eucharistic buffet. Most Catholics were satisfied and gradually returned to the old ways after the reopening of churches.

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[12] Pope Benedict XVI, "Sacramentum Caritatis," *Apostolic Exhortation*, February 22, 2007, 14, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/do cuments/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_ sacramentum-caritatis.html (accessed June 20, 2022). However, there are many other analogous statements of the Church magisterium in recent times, e.g., Pope John Paul II, "Ecclesia de Eucharistia," *Encyclical Letter*, April 17, 2003.

Therefore, the pandemic experience will probably fade away without any obvious effect. The threat to the clergy positions was averted, and the opportunity for any change was lost.

Two Concluding Observations

In conclusion, I reflect on two interesting moments concerning the experience of life without the Eucharist. The first is symbolic. Ironically, the Eucharist became inaccessible for almost all Catholics in the same year when the eucharistically saturated part of the global Church sent a message to the Catholics of Amazonia that they could do just fine without the Eucharist. The Amazonia synod reasserted the essential role of the priesthood for the Church[13] but, at the same time, it did not allow the Amazonia's local community leaders to receive priestly ordination because they were married. Making priestly celibacy voluntary for these communities was not an option – as if priests were not necessary for the life of their churches (i.e., the universal discipline of celibacy is, obviously, much more important than the Eucharist). This decision, or, rather, this lack of taking the needed decision, is very significant because the Church hierarchy is thereby confirming that their outwardly theological discourse on the Eucharist is political; the message is that it is actually not about the Eucharist but about maintaining the ecclesial *status quo*. When the *status quo* should have yielded to the Eucharist in Amazonia, the Church preferred to reinforce the *status quo*.

I appreciated life without the Eucharist in the period of banned public worship services and saw it as an opportunity. I considered it an expression of solidarity with people in parts of the world without priests, and also with all people excluded from Communion because their non-standard family lives do not meet the demands the celibate hierarchy places on Christian marriage. This is also why some clergy's hyperactivity in the crisis distribution of the Eucharist scandalized my religious feelings and why I disliked it, as I mentioned earlier.

The second moment that amused me during life in lockdown was the prophetic fantasies I enjoyed as a theologian during worship services at home. Our Sunday worship consisted of readings from the lectionary, choral readings of Psalms, and agape feasts with plain bread and tea brewed by the children or freshly squeezed orange juice. We insisted on equality. Everyone could participate in reading texts and comment on the readings in any way (effectively, everyone was allowed to preach), and everybody was asked not to ridicule other's opinions and impressions.

[13] Pope Francis, "Querida Amazonia," *Apostolic Exhortation*, February 2, 2020, 87-90, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazioneap_202002 02_querida-amazonia.html (accessed June 20, 2022).

We did not celebrate the Eucharist. I think this was because we were not such a pious family to need the Eucharist so often, or one may think we were such a pious family not to break Church law. In any case, nobody requested it. On the other hand, after this experience, I cannot abandon the utopic dream that the day will come when the hierarchy ceases to curtail the religious freedom of Catholics and does not forbid Christians from celebrating the Eucharist by preventing them from making arrangements on their own. In this utopic dream, I even glimpsed a far-away future when Christians do not indulge in regulations and bans. I saw a time when they will enjoy celebrating a Christian bar-mitzvah and bat-mitzvah with their adolescent sons or daughters, entitled – if they are interested – to minister *in persona Christi* for the first time. After all, Jesus was still relatively young when he participated in the Last Supper. Interestingly, he died at the same age as Bruce Lee.

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The Church in Quarantine:
A Harsh Wakeup Call as *Kairos* or Another
Wasted Opportunity?

Tomáš Petráček

The Spring 2020 crises and events associated with the Covid-19 pandemic disclosed a series of trends in various spheres of life, thereby accelerating some of them. Churches and religious life were no exception. While we might not like the basic message of the Covid-19 crisis, it opens up a great opportunity for us through its urgency.

Gradual Fading

Long-term trends have not changed much in the past 250 years. On the one hand, society is becoming more and more secularized in the sense of decline of declaratory Christianity. Even though this process had already started in the eighteenth century, it has been coming to its climax at the symbolic level in recent decades. On the other hand, Western society is, paradoxically, becoming much more Christian in many aspects of life, even when compared to the idealized Middle and Modern Ages. In particular, this concerns the values that are lived and accepted in society, which leads one to reflect on what Christianization actually means. Historically, the main aims of ecclesial endeavors were evangelization in the sense of recruiting new believers, and the deepening of Christianization as the blending of Christian values, patterns of behavior, and doctrine into a society's thinking and lifestyle. In the case of values such as human dignity or communal solidarity, this pursuit has, by and large, been successful. Despite all historical achievements, the Catholic Church and other mainline churches and communities have been facing a continuous decrease in believers, that is, those who self-identify as such and actively live within ecclesial structures. It is especially painful for believers to experience the inability to transmit religious practices across generations.

A growing number of believers have come to recognize the trend of an accelerated fading of ecclesial Christianity. Books such as *Gott funktionert nicht: Deswegen glaube ich an ihn* (God Does Not Work: Therefore, I Believe in Him) or *Aus, Amen, Ende? So kann ich nicht mehr Pfarrer sein* (Out, Amen, the End? I Can't Go on Being a Pastor Like This) by Thomas Frings, a very pastorally successful yet frustrated priest, speak to this very clearly.[1]

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[1] Thomas Frings, *Aus, Amen, Ende? So kann ich nicht mehr Pfarrer sein* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2017). Thomas Frings, *Gott funktioniert nicht. Deswegen glaube ich an ihn* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2019).

Western churches, despite their modern tools and funds, their abundance of skilled people, erudite theologians, and the ability to facilitate an open internal discussion, are not capable of inhibiting, let alone reversing, these trends. The Covid-19 crisis highlighted these trends, thus shattering the naïve ideas about the sustainability or renewal of the influence of traditional churches in society. In virtually all countries, the interests and needs of churches as institutions were markedly overshadowed during the pandemic. In many cases, they were completely, or almost completely, forgotten. Anecdotally, this was explicitly voiced in a statement by Czech prime minister, Andrej Babiš, whose minister of health in his government at the time was a graduate of a Catholic high school in České Budějovice.[2] For churches, this marked a moment when they could come to terms with the actual situation, their own authority, and their influence. It was and remains a moment of a harsh but much needed sobering up, a stirring moment of conversion.

A Harsh Wakeup Call

German Protestant theologian Günther Thomas suggests that during the pandemic, Baumarkt Do-it-yourself stores (a German form of Target) were more important for the government than worship services because, at the European level, churches were not even worth mentioning by either politicians or scientists. However, he maintains that churches should not feel sorry for themselves or position themselves as victims. When they identify themselves vis-à-vis the political sphere as a socially significant and charitable group that, first and foremost, acts as a moral agency through its youth and senior organizations, then of course they have a certain social value. However, they are certainly not indispensable. Thomas asserts that the pandemic has become a nail in the coffin of a public theology that, following the advice of Jürgen Habermas, has struggled to translate the distant talk of God into a terminology of moral orientation suitable for the public. Thomas suggests that what local church leaders failed to do was to see talk about God as their primary task, even if it meant running the risk of mockery or failure. What was missing was a word of hope that comforts, liberates, and encourages people. Missing was a courageous spiritual-theological orientation that local church leaders could offer during the pandemic in which they would voice what no one else could offer, namely, that even as Christians we are afflicted but not forsaken by God, and we therefore have hope and trust.[3]

In their effort to be recognized for their significance, European churches have become insignificant. This has also found a symbolic expression. In

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[2] https://denikn.cz/341179/vlada-pri-uvolnovani-restrikci-zapomnela-na-cirkve-du ka-chce-kostely-otvirat-postupne/ (accessed April 6, 2023).

[3] Günther Thomas, "Sind die Kirche nicht systemrelevant?, " *Idea Spektrum*, May 28, 2020, https://www.idea.de/spektrum/detail/sind-die-kirchen-nicht-systemreleva nt-113110.html (accessed April 6, 2023).

Eastern Germany, some churches that are superfluous and no longer used have now been turned into columbaria. [4] In Italy, during the pandemic, churches were commonly used as morgues, which seems to be a historically new phenomenon, given the extent and evidence to which this occurred. In the Seven Weeks' War (1866), churches were primarily used as provisional military hospitals. If Nietzsche referred to churches as "graves of a dead God," empty churches, or churches used as columbaria and morgues, can be defined as graves of a dead church or, more precisely, graves of a certain form of church life and structure. What harsher wakeup call do churches need? Can there be a clearer impulse and appeal to move away from spatial thinking than to radically resign the effort to maintain and conquer the institutional, societal, and political space, and to forget the pursuit of self-affirmation through wealth, political influence, and connections? Can there be any greater appeal to go straight to the core – the spiritual and religious core – of the mission of the Christian faith?

What does this all mean? Researcher and journalist Mathias Horx spoke of the Covid-19 virus as a herald from the future, summoning us to change our ways. Our civilization has become too condensed, and it proceeds at too rapid a pace. For the message to be heard, it is necessary that a society become more considerate, responsible, sympathetic, and aware of its interdependence; it needs more joy and authentic communication.[5] Nothing about these problematic trends concerns mainline churches; they have exactly opposite problems. The values that Horx mentions as an antidote to the civilizational problems are fundamentally Christian values. Who else should and can offer them if not the churches? Churches should naturally embody and radiate these values rather than nervously, or even neurotically, fight to be recognized for their social and political relevance. To be honest, can anything be changed by formally including a reference to Christianity in the constitution of the European Union?

How Can One Religiously Act as a Christian in a Time of Crisis?

Pope Francis showed one possible way to act as a Christian during the pandemic. He honored physicians, medical workers, and shop assistants, and showed solidarity with the most afflicted countries and regions. He pointed out that the pandemic is a consequence of our ill treatment of nature, which, unlike God and humans, never forgives. He did not succumb to the temptation to mock the modern veneration of science for its lack of knowing crucial

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[4] On the situation in the former GDR, see several studies in Benedikt Kranemann and Petr Štica, eds., *Diaspora als Ort der Theologie. Perspektiven aus Tschechien und Ostdeutschland*, Erfurter Theologische Schriften, Band 48 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2016).

[5] See Mathias Horx, *Die Zukunft nach Corona: Wie eine Krise die Gesellschaft, unser Denken und unser Handeln verändert* (Econ: Düsseldorf, 2020).

things and its inability to protect us. On the contrary, he distanced himself from those who interpreted the pandemic as God's punishment, and from the prophets of doom and panic. In the realm of religious life, he was like a good house owner who brings both new and old treasures out of his storeroom to comfort others through his words, deeds, and symbolic gestures. The Pope gave two extraordinary benedictions. The first one was in the midst of the deepest part of the crisis on March 16, 2020, and was aptly described by Norbert Schmidt as follows:

> A fragile old man is standing alone on a deserted square, giving an expression to our own feelings. An ancient Oriental story from an obscure Roman province reflects on plasma TVs the heavy situation of an infected late digital modern age […]. Against the despair of an omnipresent menace, there is not a doctor in a white cloak but rather a man of prayer, embodying the most vulnerable group of people with the highest mortality rate. In front of the facade of a temple as a symbol of the power and influence of the Catholic Church and papacy, the lone pope unprecedently and with the highest humility speaks about mercy freely distributed to all without difference […]. Against the impacts of the globalization, here is the Roman pontifex, a bridge builder, as their embodiment and antipole at the same time. The old bridge builder who strives to overcome our diseased loneliness in our interconnected world.[6]

What a contrast! In comparison to the usually overcrowded square with the Swiss Guard, the Carabinieri, a brass band, and all the pious folklore, the square was impressively vacant during these simple *urbi et orbi* benedictions, with only the age-old symbols of Christian faith: an ancient Marian image and a medieval cross (the Salus populi Romani icon of Santa Maria Maggiore on the Pope's right and the Saint Marcel cross on his left). It was these same symbols that had helped the citizens of the Eternal City to overcome plague epidemics in previous centuries. The Pope's speech included the following statements:

> Fears and constraints weighed heavily on us. Like the disciples in the gospel, we found ourselves amidst an unexpected and fierce storm. We realized that we all are in the same boat, vulnerable and disoriented. […] Like the disciples who cried out with one voice in their distress, saying "We are perishing!," we also noticed that we cannot continue on our own, each for him or herself, but only together. […] The storm unmasks our vulnerability and discloses the false and superficial certainties on which we have built our programs and plans, our habits and priorities. […] The Lord calls

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[6] See https://vltava.rozhlas.cz/norbert-schmidt-sam-na-namesti-8182470 (accessed April 6, 2023).

us amidst the storm to wake up and activate our solidarity and hope
that can anchor, support, and give a meaning to these moments
when everything seems to be coming to naught.[7]

Pope Francis succeeded in going to the core of Christian faith, intel-
ligibly passing on the essential hope rooted in the historical tradition of the
Catholic Church, and bringing comfort to people: There is a disastrous pan-
demic but we have had historical experiences with situations like this; we can
overcome it as we have done before, even when we did not have means at our
disposal such as we have today. Fear not!

The Challenges of the Pandemic for the Catholic Church

Pope Francis and many other Church representatives were very cautious
with regard to broadcasting worship services during the pandemic because
they did not want such broadcasts to become a daily business. Rather, they
accentuated the notion of crisis as a time of silence and introspection, as an
opportunity to reflect, and to think deeply about what carries us spiritually,
what is authentic, and what could be changed in the Church. Gerhard Feige,
the bishop of Magdeburg, criticized the concept of participation-limited
worship services via digital log in, which only the healthy and strong could
participate in, and where "digital people" would be given preferential treat-
ment over "analog people." He expressed doubts about whether such sterile
worship services could truly uplift the spirit and comfort and speak to people.[8]
By defending the outdated model of the functioning of the Church and
spatial thinking, we exhaust ourselves in vain, as is visible from the argu-
ments in the Trier diocese regarding the reduction of the number of parishes
and the establishment of mega-parishes due to a lack of priests. In this case,
the believers appealed to the Vatican against the decision, and achieved a
suspension of the planned reform. As was to be expected, there followed a
lack of energy, inner peace, and time to search for new forms of church life;
to listen to God talking to us; to open space for the Holy Spirit that would be,
humanly speaking, transformed into a search for new ways and new trends.
The pandemic-related crisis again revealed the need to diversify and discover
new forms of religious and spiritual life and new forms of liturgy. As the
pandemic reaffirmed, the solution certainly does not lie in returning to "retro-
Catholicism with its neo-magic," as theologian Julia Knop pertinently cap-
tured in various quasi-pious attempts by some to chase away the pandemic

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[7] Extraordinary moment of prayer and "Urbi et Orbi" Blessing presided over by
Pope Francis, see https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/docu
ments/papa-francesco_20200327_urbi-et-orbi-epidemia.html (accessed April 6,
2023).

[8] See https://www.dioezese-linz.at/pfarre/4485/article/148631.html (accessed April
6, 2023).

by sprinkling holy water and blessing monstrances and reliquaries from airplanes and passing cars.[9]

The Illusion of Alliance

Unfortunately, other church leaders gave a very different image during the pandemic. Rather than reflecting on the impacts of the pandemic and searching for new forms of religious life, for example, by using the experience with worship services at home, a part of the Czech Church has succumbed to the temptation of becoming an influential lobby group, getting tapped into governmental circles, and making advances in populist conservative movements. The election to the Czech Television Council of Hana Lipovská, a nominee of the Czech Bishops' Conference, was most vocally celebrated on social networks by Archbishop Dominik Duka, hard Eurosceptic and anti-immigration parties SPD and Trikolóra, and the Communist Party. Not only is this alliance strange and compromising for the Archbishop of Prague, but it also shows, in particular, how absolutely ineffective and even embarrassing this strategy is. All of these parties in the parliament supported a bill in favor of taxing the financial compensation for church restitutions. Similar to what occurred in the nineteenth century, part of the Czech Church leadership allowed themselves to be taken advantage of by political powers to defend the political status quo and to be involved in culture wars. The chair elect of the Czech Bishops' Conference defined in a "program interview" for *Konzervativní noviny* (Conservative Newspaper) one of the main tasks to defend against "pernicious ideologies" from the West.[10] The preference by some of the Czech Church leaders for the identitarian media as privileged channels of communication, over usual church and mainline newspapers and magazines or church and public TV channels, speaks volumes. Similarly, very telling is the inclination of many conservative Catholics to support the Trikolóra movement, which self-identifies as a new, ideologically firmer, and especially fiercer Christian-Democratic People's Party.

Many Catholics, including bishops and other elites, regard Christianity as an identitarian ideology and a conservative political and social power. Playing this card may perhaps, for a few more years, serve as a driving and identity-making force but it certainly cannot either represent or replace the required profound transformation. The time "won" through this process will be paid for dearly by the loss of elementary credibility and authenticity. Also, sticking with the powerful makes sense on the face of it. While the pandemic

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[9]   https://www.uni-erfurt.de/katholisch-theologische-fakultaet/fakultaet/aktuelles/theologie-aktuell/ein-retrokatholizismus-der-gerade-froehliche-urstaend-feiert-julia-knop-warnt-vor-kirchlichen-rueckschritten-angesichts-corona (accessed April 6, 2023).

[10]   See https://www.konzervativninoviny.cz/vuci-neomarxismu-mame-vetsi-imunitu/ (accessed April 6, 2023).

has fully exposed the weakness of ecclesial Christianity, the state as an institution has been reinforced and has regained credibility previously tainted by neoliberal criticism in recent decades. For the churches, however, this represents a blind alley, a step backward.

It is a historical paradox that these conservative Catholics struggle to defend a world whose creation they opposed just as stubbornly in the nineteenth century. A world founded on individualistic liberalism, our market-driven world based on competition and eliminating any links between the state and the citizen, the nation state, nationalism, and all-embracing economic thinking obsessed with an idea of monetarily expressible performance and effectiveness – all of these were not so long ago rejected by Church representatives on principle. Now, however, these same representatives distance themselves from those who strive to change these patterns of thinking and behavior.

A significant number of Church leaders lack an authentic eschatological perspective, a perception of historicity, and the penultimate nature of the Church and the whole world as well as their orientation toward the ultimate consummation. Although they profess with their mouths that the churches are led by the Holy Spirit and that God holds in God's hands the history of humankind, they in fact advise us not to venture into major endeavors but rather stick with the tried-and-tested certainties – just to be on the safe side. A pastoral letter of the archbishop of Prague Dominik Duka addressed to priests on the eve of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, and whose main message calls on priests to recommend to believers a Church-owned guesthouse, because their money spent there will improve the budget of the archbishopric, speaks for itself, speaks about the priorities and main concerns this kind of Church leaders.[11] Western society is suffering from a decade-long pandemic of loneliness,[12] hopelessness, despair, nihilism, cynicism,[13] and superficial economic pragmaticism more than from the Covid-19 pandemic. The badly needed remedy can never be a self-centered religious organization, and even less so an alliance with political parties that openly mock values such as truth and love.

What is needed is spontaneous help and cooperation – e.g., the sewing of face masks and providing assistance to elderly fellow citizens – pursued together by believers and "nonbelievers." Such initiatives have shown that contemporary society certainly is not hopeless but is in need of orientation and witness, role models and examples; it longs for hope and meaning.

Sociologically and psychologically speaking, the time of quarantine and intense experience with the pandemic was probably too short to significantly

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[11] See http://www.christnet.eu/clanky/6425/abychom_zacali_fungovat_jako_rodina.url (accessed April 6, 2023).

[12] Manfred Spitzer, *Einsamkeit. Die unerkannte Krankheit: schmerzhaft, ansteckend, tödlich* (München: Droemer, 2018).

[13] For example, Werner Schneiders, *Die Globalisierung des Nihilismus* (Freiburg: Alber, 2019).

permeate our mindset and make us change our behavior. However, who else, if not Christians, should be able to perceive and read the signs of the times and be ready for transformation? After the outcomes of the Amazon Synod were published, Pope Francis had to face a storm of criticism over the fact that his reformatory efforts have slowed down or even halted. However, the pandemic has shown that the emphasis on the content and form of his messages are even more important than structural and institutional reforms. This is evident, for instance, in the fact that one is called to think and act globally, that is, generously, in the global world. This is what Pope Francis did in a common prayer with leaders from many religions on May 14, 2020:

> We are all brothers and sisters. St Francis of Assisi used to say: "All brothers and sisters." And so, men and women of every religious confession are uniting themselves today in prayer and penance to ask for the grace of healing from this pandemic.
>
> […] We were not expecting this pandemic, it came without us expecting it, but now it is here. And many people are dying. Many people are dying alone and many people are dying without being able to do anything. […] Think about the tragedy and its consequences on the economy and education, the consequences […] that will come afterwards. And it is for this that today, everyone, brothers and sisters, of whatever religious confession, are praying to God. Perhaps someone will say: "This is religious relativism and you cannot do that." But how can we not pray to the Father of all? Everyone prays as they know how, as they can, according to what they have received from their own culture. We are not praying against each other, this religious tradition against that one, no! We are all united as human beings, as brothers and sisters, praying to God according to each one's culture, according to each one's own tradition, according to each one's own beliefs, but brothers and sisters praying to God, this is what is important! Brothers and sisters, fasting, asking God to forgive our sins, so that the Lord might have mercy on us, so that the Lord will forgive us, so that the Lord may end this pandemic. Today is a day of fraternity, looking to the one Father: brothers and sisters and paternity.
>
> […] May God put an end to this tragedy, may He stop this pandemic. May God have mercy on us and may He also put a stop to the other terrible pandemics of hunger, war, and uneducated children. This is what we ask as brothers and sisters, all together.[14]

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[14] Pope Francis, Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis "Day of Fraternity, Day of Penance and Prayer," May 14, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200514_giornodi-fratellanza-penitenza-preghiera.html (accessed April 6, 2023).

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