Leaving religion behind: Varieties of non-believers

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Draft version

Introduction

The well-known anecdote of Gordon W. Allport can be taken as the kick-off of our research and analysis of 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."
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> (Allport 1958, 4)

There are two classifications behind this short dialogue. The one is based on skin color, black or white, and the second is Catholic or non-Catholic. Prejudices are societies' capacities to make order in cultural and social relations and support societal orientations. Allport's anecdote demonstrates the most frequently used, dichotomic categorization. Like the paradigm of Kierkegaard's Either/Or, you can belong either to one particular category or to the other. There are no more alternatives. Dichotomous categorizations provide societies, just as institutions and organizations, with a kind of security-feeling 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 are higher in societies living in insecure circumstances and in times of deep transformations. Dichotomic categorizations simplify the plural and confused reality and encourage communities and private persons to make decisions and act.

Reality and lived experiences always bring a kind of contrast experience regarding dichotomic categories. Meeting people living in various circumstances and the logic of their thinking strongly relativizes the simplifications. The Either/Or attempts don't work anymore; a concrete person can be categorized into simple categories only by destroying their uniqueness and personality. Simple dichotomic classes are abstract, but the concrete persons' vernacular reality is always tactual on the opposite side. 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 the simple dichotomous categories and try to

relativize the inherited and routinized prejudices. Our main aim is to explore the latent dimensions behind the categories of "nones" and "unbelievers."

The categories of social sciences concerning religions and religiosities are multifaceted. They are elaborated based on approaches and theories of scholarly efforts. All theoretical models have their genealogy, and more importantly, they are aroused in the realm of unique and particular societal experiences and observations. In all today's essential category systems regarding typology and classification of religiosity, it is easy to find the mutual interactions of the original adventures and observations and the attempts of understanding and interpretations. In the actual process of this interaction between data and interpretation came the theory that we now take as for granted. Some prestigious theorists of religion developed their theoretical concept and classification system quickly, and others dealt with their data and observations longer. In our recent study, we try to work rather slowly with our theoretical reflections and classifications. We argue for meditative patience in the 'dwelling with the data' and in reserving time for discussions.

In our option for slowness, we are partly motivated by Milan Kundera's book *Slowness*. He tried to describe life in Czech society with a particularly slow rhythm. Not because real-life under the 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 and a new man, 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, the other important source for cautiousness is the book of Tomás Halík, *Patience with God* (2009). 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, it has a destructive effect to use the simple dichotomy of believer versus non-believer or faithful versus atheist.

The disciplinary history of studying religious opinions, psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology has almost a century-long history. According to this extended time of theoretical investigations, we have many varieties in finely elaborated classifications. In contrast, regarding the nones, the higher scholarly interest arose about two decades ago. Therefore, we are still situated in the theory-generative turbulent period of the mutual interaction between data and observations on the one side and theoretical approaches on the other.

Methodology

In this project, we embarked on conducting interviews with people who are disengaged with religions. The sample consisted of interviewees who had a non-religious upbringing or a somewhat blurry but non-defining religious background and left religion behind.

Research of 'nones' is scarce in Central and Eastern Europe; qualitative approaches to 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 nonreligion 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.
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> (Bubík, Remmel and Václavík, 2020: 6-7)

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 as non-religious. However, the results are repeatedly misleading. It mostly operates 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 non-religious.

From a methodological point of view, however, we run into difficulties. On the one hand, previous analysis in CEE have not specifically examined the worldview of non-believers and their attitudes in detail, and on the other hand, that nonreligion can only be revealed to a limited extent by quantitative data collection.

Everyone constructs 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. Everyone chooses 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. In addition, it is important to be aware that the category of "nones" has non-static characteristics, such as the components of "non-belief," which may change in parallel with the development of personal life, cultural and interpersonal experiences. Thus, within nonreligion, even in the case of a single individual shifts of emphasis may appear, that is, in the depth and intensity of non-belief. Consequently, our task is to explore these personal attitudes, their driving forces among individuals who classify themselves in the overall category of nones.

Through our qualitative approach, we compiled a semi-structured questionnaire and asked about the attitudes of the individuals who define themselves as non-believers. 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 earlier in their contributions of what we might refer to as the 'non-religious turn' that there is an abundance of terms referring to the disengagement with religion. In accordance with them, we argue that nonreligion and the nones are not a satisfying analytical category. Among others Matthew Engelke refers to atheism, godlessness, and nonreligion as troublesome words, especially if deployed in hopes of having much analytic purchase (Engelke 2017: 135).

As expressed above, while the categories of affiliated, 'religious in my own way' or non-religious might suggest clear-cut and safe definitions, once emerging ourselves in the analysis of the interviews with the nones we find the uncertainty of the multiplicity and ambiguity of lived religious and non-religious experiences.

The current study is based on 10 Czech (marked as CZ) and 10 Hungarian (marked as HU) interviews. The semi-structured interviews followed the preset research question of understanding the worldviews, spiritual practices and lifeworlds of non-religious individuals (referred to as nones). The interviews were conducted based on a previously discussed set of questions in order to make comparison possible between the Czech and Hungarian data.

The landscape of religious unaffiliation or 'nones'

Psychologist William James wrote: "Some persons, for instance, never are, and possibly never under any circumstances could be, converted. Religious ideas cannot become the centre 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 to-day 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 centre, and the latter remains inactive in perpetuity." (1901-1902, 204-205)

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 only 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 of religious and non-religious 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 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 nones could be drawn up. The nuances and differences between the categories are illustrated through some representative interview excerpts. We haven't conducted enough interviews yet in order to complete and finalized this categorization. We believe there are more categories. We would like to point to the problem that nones are a highly colourful group and analytically difficult to categorize them into one group as there are huge differences within the group. In conclusion, the colourful and multiple characteristics of the nones can be best grasped through empirical/ethnographic analysis.[1]

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 (baptism, wedding, funeral). These experiences are not necessarily positive, however, we haven't encountered any explicit anti-religious or anti-clerical comments in interviews that were grouped in this category. The significance of social expectation should be highlighted at this point. Several individuals expressed that it is either a need to satisfy the expectations of elder family members through participating at life-cycle ceremonies.

    HU01

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[1] 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.

"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 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 magical, but I was no longer interested in faith matter. 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 does 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. This 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 realize the need for certain religious/spiritual guiding principles. Through their life course they seem to be open to religious ideas and later in their life they evolve spiritually and embrace 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 seeker will find some of what survives in his/her country, either in the form of the once prevailing religion, or 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 at work. 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 any more. So I can't say I'm against the fur or the taste, but that's the way it is. I just don't have it yet, maybe I will someday. Maybe I saw 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 they 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, 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, so she converted to Orthodox Christianity and gradually became more and more orthodox. My grandmother's dad was first a hedonist and a man who reads 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 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."

Cz9

"- How has your view of religion changed over time?
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 non-religious view of the world?
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 for now. 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 /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 name as 'diffused' based on Cipriani' term of diffused religion. (Cipriani 2017) People are parallely on the one side outside of the traditional religious organisation but on the other side also inside, and are by far no more religious but atheist, despite their deep socio-religious interconnectedness.

J10 (from catholicism to atheism)

"- Do you connect with others who share your beliefs and view of the world?
This is one problem with my deconversion. I know two people with similar fate. The religious people don't understand what my problem is, for the non-believers it's all completely Dada. I am very much alone in this fundamental view of the world for me. 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."

2)   'Remnants' of religious worldview or practice as coping mechanism

In this chapter we would like to highlight the most characteristic dimensions of the spiritual lives of the religiously unaffiliated. Although nones turn away from forms of institutional religiosity, certain coping mechanisms necessary 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 (2016, 158), however, in her book *The Spiritual Lives of the American Nones* we learn that many of American nones see prayer as an important part of their spiritual lives, 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.
>
> (Drescher 2016, 171)

Further important categories 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 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 for ritual and prayer among atheists. As William Irwin, professor of Philosophy at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, wrote:

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...
(https://iai.tv/articles/prayer-for-atheists-auid-1181)

a) Prayer as magic praxis

HU01

"- Either in a religious or everyday sense, but do you think prayer works?
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."

HU05

"- Do you think that prayers work?
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 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 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 coronavirus, 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

HU06

"- Do you believe in resurrection?

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."

3) Institution and communal dimensions

The third dimension we explored is the institutional background of the religious orientations and preferences. Under institutional, we understand the typical religious institutions like churches and denominations and, more widely, all other types of institutions, like movements, colts, friendship circles, etc. As Peter L. Berger, among many others, underlined, private persons and society are creative towards each other. It means private persons explain themself toward the society creating it with the same act. Moreover, otherwise, private persons are created by society too. This understanding of the knowledge transfer in modern societies is very relevant for analyzing the institutional dimension of religious orientation. Although private persons have an exceptional feature of their religiosity, at the same time, they are still sharing their worldview and *religionview*. They are still meeting as members of a particular society the variety of religious or quasi-religious supplies and give a particular answer to this.

To sum up, almost the absolute majority of our respondents have more negative and alienating experiences with the holy mass, crucifix, cold church building, etc. during their childhood. If they mention the church's positive aspects, they are doing it already from an outsider perspective, already after leaving the church 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 horrorous. 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."

Not only historical/mainline church institutions can be alienating but new religious movement settings and youth religious small community (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 interwoven 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 this, we visited for a while."

HU01

"He is more involved with these spiritual practices. He is this 'firewalking' type... I am not so much involved in these practices, however, we discuss our thoughts and influence each other in a way."

Cz09

"- Do you connect with others who share your beliefs and view of the world? Rather, I find it so with existing friends, and oddly enough, we agree with some 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 overviewing the dimensions of leaving and finding religion, it is useful to come back to our introductory remarks. As we have argued, simplistic classifications are useful and comprehensive in politics and in maintaining institutional interests. One of them is churches' interest in two different ways—first, the self-understanding of the churches as societal entities. Second, the consequence of the church's identity concerning the fulfilling of her mission in the society. Without wishing to refer to the various theoretical considerations concerning the churches and their social positions, it is crucial to be aware of the regional characteristics of the churches' ecclesial-political identity.

In both societies, in the Czech Republic and Hungary, churches' representatives seem to be in a kind of hard pressing collective spiritual status. The sources for that are clear and simple. The already mentioned memory of persecution pushed churches to the margins of society. Church's representatives and theologians as well use an inherited dichotomic classification in their thinking about the church. On the one side, the church members and institutions, while on the other, the society with the unchurched, areligious or antireligious individuals. This kind of ecclesial classification brings and enforces a feature of the outside society as secularized and indeed hostile. Churches think they should assert themselves against the "outside" society. In the Czech Republic, the outside society is understood as atheistic, in Hungary as non-religious.

The main consequence of this type of dichotomizing society is the fundamental logic of the mission. Churches think they have the divine goods and they should bring them "abroad" to the hostile society. The society outside the churches does not have the grace, the divine goods, and even more fully secularized, it seems to not need the grace. Dichotomous classification of the society did not allow for the church an intensive

dialogue with the society. This type of ecclesial understanding of the society and culture remembers the time of the conflict between the church and the modern time in the nineteenth century. The Catholic Church's representatives headed by the Pius-popes used to communicate with the society and with the Zeitgeist in a kind of unquestionable manner, while the Catholic Church as an institution rapidly lost her power position. The basically self-dependent situation of the church led to an apologetical ecclesiology and missionary strategy. Mutatis mutandis the same matrices of self-understanding and teaching logic we observe in the Central European societies today. Although the societies are very different regarding the level of religiosity, the 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 the society, not least in the interest of a more appropriate understanding of the chances of the church's mission. If churches would be able to recognize the varieties of religiosity and non-religiosity 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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