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## Spirituality and Autonomous Religion in Southern Ontario: A Sociological and Theological Study

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Theology

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Spirituality and Autonomous Religion in Southern Ontario:  
A Sociological and Theological Study

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Christopher J. Medland

Graduate Program in Theology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

This thesis analyzes non-institutional forms of religion in Southern Ontario with depth and description, via interviews of a specific local population sample ( $n = 10$ ), and provides interpretation of these phenomena within a practical theological perspective (via typology). This analysis shows measurable potential for the development of a form of personal theological autonomy that is prevalent in this sample of individuals. The aspirations of the participants have suggested two possible types emerging from this sample of spiritual adherents: 1) the “inclusive seeker” and 2) the “spiritual-political activist”. This sociological account of the so-called “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR; and in some but not all cases, “nones”) also informs practical theological reflection on ‘post Judeo-Christian esoteric spirituality.’ Suggestions are finally given that point towards a post-secular – though entirely pneumatological – theology which accounts for the autonomy of the individual outside of the institutional ecclesia.

## Keywords

Spirituality, Autonomy, Secularization, Post-Secular Society, Empirical Theology, Implicit Religion, Practical Theology, Pneumatology, Sociology of Religion.

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## List of Abbreviations

Terms generated via interview narrative analysis in connection with the study:

PJCES                    *Post Judeo-Christian Esoteric Spirituality*

SPA                     *Spiritual-Political Activist*

IS                        *Inclusive Seeker*

Terms of frequent reference:

SBNR                    *Spiritual but not Religious*

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## Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author (C. Medland), which was completed as a graduate student project in theology between 2013-2015 under the supervision of Dr. Gary D. Badcock. The fieldwork reported in chapter two was covered under Western University Ethics Certificate number 105065 (see Appendix C). In this regard, Dr. Badcock was known as the “Principal Investigator” of the study, while the author was known as the “Student Researcher.” However, all claims, assertions, and analyses belong to the author of this thesis.

## Introduction

In this work I recognize a necessary tension between sociology and theology, and thus suggest a method for interpreting localized religion in a meaningful way: via practical theology. This thesis analyses current expressions in the narratives of ‘spiritual but not religious’ people (henceforth SBNR) in Southern Ontario, and suggests that: 1) *a lingering movement of spiritual-political activism lies just beneath the surface of secular society* and 2) *the aforementioned and associated phenomena are closely related to the theme of autonomy, which can be interpreted theologically as a non-institutional and post-secular expression of pneumatological significance*. I have also identified a typology of ‘Post-Judeo-Christian Esoteric Spirituality’ (henceforth PJCES) via sociological and qualitative research methods. In the context of this schema, the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas’ speculation of a developing post-secular reality can be employed in order for PJCES to inform Christian pneumatology from a practical-theological perspective.

The modern stress on personal autonomy is, of course, something often seen as a source of the anti-religious ethos evident in the contemporary West. However, a syncretistic version of a secularized and politicized Christian ethos is perceived to be behind this expressed need for autonomy. The dynamic in view thus merits, I shall suggest, a closer examination by theologians in particular. Even though social theory is certainly one of the most antithetical intellectual pursuits when taken alongside theology, it is precisely within this dialectic that theologians must engage the post-secular nature of society. Indeed, the knowledge and methods of sociology probably provide the theologian with the only means of actually doing so.

Furthermore, I argue that the spiritual-political relationship of these types of individuals can be taken as an anthropological indication of the continuing work of the Spirit in the public sphere. It is taking place not in the so-called ‘citadels of knowledge’ of the decadent West, but among mundane, secular, and everyday life in our culture. All of the above assertions, I will claim, are especially relevant when encountered from a practical-theological approach to the activity of the Spirit among the masses of persons

characterized by the theologian Karl Rahner as ‘anonymous Christians.’ This can lead theological reflection *and* action towards encouraging praxis that is more in line with concerns of the human being,<sup>1</sup> and not only with the concerns of theoretical theology.

This thesis has three chapters which will essentially take the following path. Chapter One places an imperative on practical theological method(s) as possibly the only way of approaching post-secular forms of non-institutional spirituality, from the perspective of the institutions themselves. Chapter Two suggests how qualitative research methodology can actually aid in the task of doing practical theology. After this, the ideal typological definitions alluded to above are suggested and depicted using a variety of technical explanations and visual/graphical organization. Chapter Three then aims to assess how such an approach to qualitative research, with an emphasis on thick description of narrative, can assist in suggesting theological developments in the area of Christian pneumatology. The conclusion then offers a post-secular conceptualization of both non-institutional religion and Christian practice, and in both cases challenges ‘autonomous’ individuals and institutions to understand the Spirit in complementary ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Baum in ed. Robin Gill, *Theology and Sociology: A Reader*, (London: Cassell, 1996), 143.

## Chapter 1

### 1 To 'Practice' Theology in Secular Society

#### 1.1 Thesis Elucidation

This thesis argues concretely that non-institutional spirituality, as a form of post-secular religion, can be examined via practical theological methods, interpreted in the light of Christian pneumatology, and serve as a source of new insight into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from a broadly Christian theological view. The implication is that certain social scientific methods, and in this case the process of in-depth interviewing, actually can generate knowledge significant both sociologically and theologically. Sociologically, I maintain that what I shall call 'post Judeo-Christian esoteric spirituality' (PJCES) represents – on a micro level – a form of religion which is sociologically pervasive, a claim which contrasts with the overtly secularized analyses of society often argued in more general assessments of the fate of twentieth-century religion in the West. However, my assessment is critical of the desires which motivate, in particular, the associated forms of spiritual 'seeking' and 'activism' (i.e., those which undergird a desire for autonomy) within PJCES. Theologically, I have argued, that inside the post-Christian ethos of activism within the spirituality described in my study there is potential for Christians to discern a non-institutional expression of the Holy Spirit's presence and work. The argument ultimately attempts to make room for a post-secular Christian understanding of pneumatology, interestingly arising from outside the institutional forms of ecclesia, yet which be viewed as related to many pneumatic expressions familiar to Christians.

The approach detailed above culminates, as I suggest in Chapter Three, in a pneumatology relevant to ordinary people's experience as represented by certain kinds of sociological research (that of this study and beyond). In a localized Western context, a series of narratives were collected and analyzed which literally *speak* the directly religious experiences of the study's participants. These phenomena, as I maintain throughout this thesis, suggest a non-institutional religious practice which can be understood from a Christian perspective as broadly in line with (though by no means exhausting) the work of the Holy Spirit. I have therefore claimed that PJCES and the

experiences of some ‘spiritual but not religious’ (SBNR) adherents represent a phenomenon which reflects the relationship of the Holy Spirit with people that is occurring *outside* of the bounds and authority of the institutional Churches.

It is acknowledged, of course, that this approach, which values an interwovenness of sociological method and pneumatological reasoning, is in some sense something developed not entirely within the confines of traditional approaches either to sociology or theology. However, in an open effort to maintain the necessity of a practical theology for today, and of an empirical emphasis within that practical theology, I maintain throughout this work that such a process of dialectical reasoning is of fundamental importance when analyzing both current strands of spiritual practice, and theological conceptions of the transcendence of the Holy Spirit in Christian thought and practice. This means, for our purposes, that a Christian pneumatology must account for the Holy Spirit wherever God allows such knowledge to be uncovered – in this case among the contemporary spiritual practices I have herein dubbed PJCES. A purely and materially sociological analysis would, of course, stop well short of such a claim. Such reasoning is necessarily limited regarding matters such as the *spiritual* meaning of narrative claims as analyzed in this study. The practical theological method used, on the other hand – though not an absolute failsafe against the reductionism favoured by much sociology and social theory – also allows challenges the highly theoretical treatment of many accounts of the work of the Spirit, and seeks to inform the traditionally more cloistered positions usually inhabited by more systematic theological understandings regarding the very same phenomena with empirical research.

The main question I have approached through my research was: *what is desired in the practice of contemporary spirituality?* This was undertaken in a special localized context, and not as part of any formal institutionalized group. The answers that I received and interpreted from my participants in the interview study have convinced me that *autonomy* is the most important concern for spiritual practice outside of institutions. The defining answer that I offer here to my question is that *autonomy in contemporary spirituality in Southern Ontario, as a middle-class phenomenon, is a fully commodified desire*. However, in extension to mere sociological analyses, I also suggest how this can

be understood from a critical theoretical perspective, and what it means from a practical theological perspective. PJCES is not beyond the communal and unifying work of the Spirit, as it represents a distinct post-secular expression of traditional, or institutional, spirituality.

What this means sociologically is that within a post-secular forum from which ‘communicative reasoning’ can be used, these types of spiritual people can develop the potential to become less fragmented and begin to establish a widespread sense of community and belonging in a post-secular sense. What this means theologically, I wish to suggest, is that the concept and action of the Holy Spirit is latent among ‘anonymous Christianity’ in the spirituality that I have called PJCES within a Western hemisphere context of secularization. The assertions given above are the ones that I aim to develop and defend in this thesis. I am, of course, reflexive to the materially antithetical nature of the above assertions, but by a process of dialectic reasoning between them am interested to explore the possibilities latent in combining both sociological knowledge and theological reasoning in this thesis.

Theology can aid human understanding of God today as it has done in the past. However, sociology has often been discarded as relevant to theological understanding, in keeping with sociologists’ typical reductionism of religion into various intellectualisms, and thus subsuming and eclipsing the meaning of theology. Theology, though an ancient discipline, itself concerned especially with the spiritual, has become entangled in the modern project as well. However, a certain humility can be brought to bear amongst both bodies of knowledge in order to aid in humane understanding, but one cannot propose such a massive claim within a work like this. What can be done is a practical exposition of the methods and theories from both knowledge centres. This is what I have done in the process of interviewing spiritual people and interpreting their narratives in light of both social theory and Christian pneumatology. In this chapter I will detail why this approach is important, and what can be done with the data it reveals.



## 1.2 Why Practical Theology?

The ways in which I attempt to fulfill this imperative to practice theology are not unique, but the methods can yield unforeseen results. This involves a process of beginning with traditional theology, as a set of doctrines about God, for example, and branching into the realm of social meaning, which typically is not the starting place of theology.

In doing so, however, I want to address astute voices from two potential dialogic sides as an overture. First, there is the God of St. Paul's faith, as represented in the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles:

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." (Acts 17: 22-23)<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, there is the following comment on how God is *theoretically* conceived of in the Western world today, from the pen of the eminent German sociologist Ulrich Beck:

A God of One's Own is not an omnipotent God. He is a God who has become impotent and homeless in an apocalyptic age. He is a God who, if He is not to perish, stands in need of the human beings who have repudiated Him. Why did God create man? Because He wanted to be acknowledged [...]<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, both the ideal and popular concepts of God have changed since the first century CE. But has God's revelation changed? Under a globalized and increasingly technologically synchronized world economy, the perceived need for a God is no longer the same one as in many inceptions from the past. The Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, in a commentary on the work of his famous contemporary, Henri de Lubac, claimed that "a sociocracy [...] has completely swallowed up all theology and

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<sup>2</sup> Oxford University Press, *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal Deuterocanonical Books*, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Henceforth any Biblical references will be taken from the NRSV.

<sup>3</sup> Ulrich Beck, *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 9.

philosophy, all fact-transcending thought.”<sup>4</sup> Strangely enough, von Balthasar’s scholarship on de Lubac’s theology also yields a corollary insight into contemporary critical social theory: that of the Western philosophical abolishment of theism in favour of a misappropriated ‘selfless’ and imported form of Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> The recent work of the radical social theorist Slavoj Žižek *also* describes spiritual ‘commodity fetishism.’<sup>6</sup> One way of viewing this social problem potentially suggests that the ‘dissociation’<sup>7</sup> of Christianity from Western society at-large to a further degree does not result in Godlessness, which is *contra* the polemics of mainstream secularization theory.<sup>8</sup> The dissociation of Christianity from public consciousness has created the conditions in which those typically having practiced spirituality in an institutional context now practice these same things in private. Yet in the sort of faith described here through interview study analysis, SBNR people evidence something more than a mere Western obsession with the autonomous self. The social constructs that we understand as autonomy are related to conceptions of divinity, and it is this connection between sociological analysis and theological concerns that has been the most important finding in this project. This means, theologically, that though people perceive that they cannot legitimately worship God in secular society, nevertheless they may in certain contexts aim to worship something like a traditional conception of divinity, in a spiritual yet private way.

Christian faith is primarily a set of practices, yet this concept is often absent from social theory or philosophical theology. The great twentieth century theologian, Karl Barth, put it in these terms (translated from the German):

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<sup>4</sup> Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Theology of Henri De Lubac: An Overview* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 53.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-59.

<sup>6</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Die Gazette Israel, 27 August 2001 “Self-Deceptions On Being Tolerant and Smug,” <http://www.lacan.com/Žižek-self.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> David Fergusson, *Faith and its Critics: A Conversation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> See Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), *passim*.

His summons is [i.e., Jesus' summons to the disciples; John 8:12], however, that they should give to him and therefore to God a true and serious and total faith: not a mere acceptance of the fact that he is their Lord not an idle confidence that they are helped by him; but this acceptance and confidence as a faith that is lived out and *practiced* by them [emphasis mine]; a faith that is proved to be a true and serious faith by the fact that it includes at once their obedience – what Paul called the “obedience of faith” ([Gk.] *hupakoē pisteōs*) in Rom 1:5 and 16:26, and “obey Christ” ([Gk.] *hupakoē tou Christou*) in 2 Cor 10:5.<sup>9</sup>

The Christian witness is thus called to practice faith, which in its purely ecclesial expression is always in-itself insufficient, provisional, and fallen, yet still brings forth opportunity for the knowledge and service of God.<sup>10</sup> The practice of faith, however, is not limited to the ecclesial sphere. A practical theology, then, aims to put theological knowledge into practice *anywhere*, i.e. it is in no way stunted by the purely modern binary conception of ‘church as sacred vs. society as secular.’

My way of practicing theology is to take note of the many methods and theories from the sociology of religion and qualitative research methods, which present overall an imperative to the theologian to examine what can be found out empirically about human religious experience. These newer methods can become part of the human pursuit of the knowledge of God generally. Nevertheless, in my way of practicing theology, it is God who really matters. From examining Barth's 1931 acclamation of St Anselm's theological method in *Fides Quarens Intellectum*, Philip Rosato comments that in all of Anselm's theology “is the conviction that the theologian is neither to lead man to faith, to confirm faith, nor to deliver faith from doubt. [...] Theology employs faith in order to penetrate into God's being.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, this became Barth's overall conviction for the *Church Dogmatics* as well – a point which Barth himself felt strongly, and which was also fully recognized by von Balthasar.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Excerpted from *Church Dogmatics* vol. 4 part 2, in Karl Barth, *The Call to Discipleship*, ed. K. C. Hanson, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Gary D. Badcock, *The House Where God Lives: Renewing the Doctrine of the Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 303-304; 309.

<sup>11</sup> Philip J. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T. & T Clark, 1981), 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

To arrive at this same goal, however, smaller steps are necessary, and we need as theologians to be aware of the contribution of the social sciences, and to engage with them. Theologically, the aim of this thesis, as stated above, is accordingly to argue, via both sociological and theological methodology and through a practical and a theoretical approach, how the narratives of a small sample of non-institutional spiritual interlocutors<sup>13</sup> can be understood as suggesting: (1) that a sense of post-secular religious *belonging* is possible, and (2) that a contribution to Christian pneumatology can be constructed by means of practical-theological interpretation.

As has been indicated already, nuanced interpretation of interview data thus far has yielded two particular ideal types of spiritual adherents in addition to one overarching thematic expression common to all participants: the desire for autonomy. This has proven to be a more fruitful approach to this research than relying on social theory alone. Theological interaction with the discourses of the interlocutors and the emergent typologies and themes has generated a contemporary rationale from which to propose a framework for constructing a post-secular doctrinal approach to the Spirit. However, even in the case of Jürgen Habermas, committed as his life's work has been to methodological atheism and critical theory, he has found it well worth contesting the onslaught of overt secular reasoning in that it has been exploited under late capitalism in order to prevent action against the colonization of the lifeworld.<sup>14</sup> This has been especially prevalent under the assumed hegemony of the rationality and autonomy of choice in consumer culture. The same choices now apply to private religion as well.

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<sup>13</sup> There is some overlap here between the themes of the “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR, also referred to as “Nones”) found in Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and the “believing without belonging” thesis as per Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984; 1987), 196, 305.

To this end, instead of the idea of religion representing an abstraction,<sup>15</sup> I will simply refer to Paul Tillich who defined religion as that which human beings consider their “ultimate concern.”<sup>16</sup> Certainly this does not describe in near enough detail the theological implications of religion, which is a task of this thesis, yet the above concept from Tillich does accurately and succinctly describe a working, generic understanding of religion, and this helps to clearly qualify the narratives of the participants in the interview study. If we can move towards a more nuanced definition of religion which fits within Tillich’s language of ‘ultimate concern,’ one may suggest that the participants in this study have been engaged in a general form of PJCES, and they identify themselves with the labels of: 1) ‘spiritual but not religious, 2) having no religious affiliation, but engaging in spiritual practices (the ‘nones’ as a religious identity), or 3) some combination of both of the aforementioned. But what if all of these sentiments are, in fact, entirely religious claims in and of themselves? I argue that all of the above are actually religious claims, even if there are defined over-against traditional religion. Thus we arrive at the contemporary notion of “implicit” religion, or “secular” religion, *contra* normative or institutional religion.

In equating implicit religion with secular religion I should clarify these terms to a degree, and in doing so I suggest that Edward Bailey has provided an appropriate discussion of the associated phenomena:

[Implicit religion] asks whether our understanding might be enhanced (both broadened and deepened), if we were to regard this *meta*-physical dimension of their lives (above, or better, beyond, and additional to the simply physical), those *super*-natural elements within all human lives, which are somehow “more” than the obvious mechanical and repetitive natural

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<sup>15</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978, 1963); cf. Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Kenneth Cracknell, *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 160-176.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1958; 1957), 1-4; However, Tillich’s remarks on religion are still provisional, as F. Gerrit Immink comments: “Tillich is the classical example of a theologian who feels that we can never refer to God with our language and concepts. In this he joins Schleiermacher.” from Gerrit Immink, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction* [In God geloven.English] (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 41.

elements, as being in some way comparable to what we usually call “religion,” even when it seems to be “secular.”<sup>17</sup>

One of the places implicit religion can be found is in the desire for autonomous individuals as SBNR adherents to unite, even though this desire has been constantly waylaid by the colonizing influences of late capitalism in a secular context. However, the concept of spiritual political activism can help suggest that under the guise of much SBNR behaviour lies a social need for the construction of *its own* forms of ideology, even though this particular want is not necessarily desirable in-and-of itself. It is in the construction of ethical ideologies that spiritual political activists will be able to influence more open minded ‘seekers’ of the future SBNR practitioners, as ideology permeates all social life including religion (according to Žižek).<sup>18</sup> In light of the ideological meaning of religion in a commodified lifeworld, one might question whether any of the types or themes concerning autonomy have any connection at all with religion, much less with Christianity, and to an even lesser extent with the concerns of Christian pneumatology. The notion of implicit religion will represent the future communal and institutional potential for the spiritualities encountered in the interview project. The reason this spirituality can be seen as religion, accordingly, given the concept of implicit religion delineated above, is because this spiritual identity comes with responsibilities that extend beyond the explicit desires of the autonomous individual.

Religion is a standard part of the civil landscape of how modern liberal humanists construct the ethical nature of society in the West. Its role, however, is characteristically limited by much ordinary thinking about civil society to the “private” sphere, since “society” is assumed to operate on grounds that are religiously neutral. What a source such as Žižek is saying, however, is that religious influences remain as potent sources of social order (and disorder). In this sense, we can actually even liken the modern ideal of *secular* society itself to something on a par with the prior position of institutional religion.

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Bailey, “‘Implicit Religion?’: What might that be?” *Implicit Religion* 15, no. 2 (2012), 196.

<sup>18</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, New ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2008; 1989), 30.

The eminent sociologist Pierre Bourdieu found American social democracy in its twentieth century neo-liberal form to be quasi-religious in its commitment to free-market capitalism: “The most fully developed form of this utopian capitalism is undoubtedly the myth of the ‘stockholder democracy’.”<sup>19</sup> The contemporary spiritualities examined in our study embody a religious version of the secular phenomena of ‘achieved socialism’ in Bourdieu’s scathing critique of neo-liberalism. The lost cultural legacy of religion becomes explicit due to the existence of non-institutional spirituality. This is not to claim that Bourdieu’s critique above was aimed directly at religion. However, this ‘achieved socialism,’ which is exactly the opposite of what it claims to be, achieves universal liberation of all forms of social life including religion. In the vastness of consumer society Bourdieu questions the assumed legitimacy of free-market absolutism, and in much the same way critics of contemporary spirituality must comment on the commodification of religious impulse within this same system.

This notion of the ‘commodification of religion’ is not to be taken to mean the ‘commoditization’ of religion in a purely material sense. Instead, what is meant here is the ability for the religious desires of individuals to become satisfied through patterns of ‘supply and demand’ practices typically not found in traditional religious belonging. This satisfaction can happen economically, socially, and spiritually, but crucially, it is actually marketable under the conditions of life in capitalist and post-secular society. We shall return to this concept at multiple points in this thesis.

Commodification of religion has, however, been seen earlier in the twentieth century, and I would venture to claim that some of the first modelers of this were mystical gurus such as George Gurdjieff (1866-1945)<sup>20</sup> and Peter Ouspensky (1878-1947).<sup>21</sup> Gurdjieff and Ouspensky are mainly relevant here because of the foreshadowing

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<sup>19</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Social Structures of the Economy*, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity, 2005). 226.

<sup>20</sup> See Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 1st ed. (New York, Harcourt, Brace: 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Also see Gurdjieff’s disciple’s work in P. D. Uspenski, and Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, *The Fourth Way: a Record of Talks and Answers to Questions Based on the Teaching of G.I. Gurdjieff*. (New York: Knopf, 1957).

of contemporary spirituality in their immense influence as highly esoteric spiritual teachers at the beginning of the twentieth century. They were able to use their abilities to ‘teach’ non-institutional spirituality to those socially and economically able to afford it. They, in a way, foreshadowed the ‘holistic milieu’ that is now purchasable spiritually in Western society. That said, from an ecclesial perspective, practical theology can help to paint a clearer picture of these spiritual and theological phenomena for today. Therefore, with the massive precedence of spiritual teaching throughout church history, alongside a rich tradition of non-institutional spirituality found in the esoterism of teachers like those mentioned above, both religion and spirituality must be critiqued, and not only one or the other.

My research draws not only on the interpretation of ‘raw’ primary research but also relies heavily on the existing theoretical scholarship on the matter. In this manner, the interdisciplinary nature of this research will be able to reveal not only data and analysis, but also suggest how that data might be used to inform theology. This will mean, for our purposes, the ability to become reflexive to the making of theology and how this is legitimated by those who make it, as well as how this is accepted or *resisted* by those for whom theology is supposedly made.<sup>22</sup> This is important too because theologians must be aware of who theology is meant to affect on a human level. To this end, I received a strong sense of the interlocutors’ disavowedness toward, and distrust of, institutional hierarchies while concurrently harbouring preference for either: (a) fragmented and individualized belief, and/or (b) a strong sense of unrealized “*communitas*.”<sup>23</sup> The polarity of community vs. autonomy permeates many of the themes that figure heavily in the recent literature surrounding people who have been termed religious ‘nones,’ SBNR, and/or those who are termed “believing without belonging.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> T. Howland Sanks, "Homo Theologicus: Toward A Reflexive Theology (With the Help of Pierre Bourdieu)," *Theological Studies* 68, no. 3 (Sep 2007, 2007), 529-530.

<sup>23</sup> This term has been defined by John Eric Killinger, “*Communitas*,” in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, ed. David A. Leeming (Springer US, 2014), 352.

<sup>24</sup> Grace Davie also delineates on this concept in Geoffrey Ahern and Grace Davie, *Inner City God: The Nature of Belief in the Inner City* (London; Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987), 71-74; In yet another



However, to equate all of these terms would seemingly be a mistake, because they can often mean different things to different people for different reasons. This thesis will argue, however, that the very interlocutors embodying the typologies mentioned above may in fact become the seedbed for new patterns of belonging in a post-secular environment. Such a statement, I argue, is only possible via practical theological methods and reflections.

In terms of Christian theology, it is suggested here also that a pneumatological framework can embrace the developments which the post-secular situation allows to arise. Thus the cultural milieu of Southern Ontario's non-institutional religious movements may be indicative of a new (or, at least, newly realized) theological need. The question of the experiential work of the Spirit among humanity, at the same time autonomous of human will and action<sup>25</sup> and relationally defined in terms of Trinitarian theology,<sup>26</sup> is perhaps more relevant to theological reflection in today's post-secular, post-Christian context, as found in the spiritual 'holistic milieu' than ever before. I would suggest, however, that the practical theological method – as a form for developing missional praxis (or, really, any doctrinal assertion) on the basis of pneumatic presence – must rely on Trinitarian formulation: lest the task of practical theology be dissociated from its source in God.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.3 Explication of the Interview Study

The data for this research project were obtained as part of a study entitled *The Autonomous Individual in Non-Institutional Religion Among the Educated Middle-Class*

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work, she also connects this notion to the idea of "vicarious religion", as found in *The Sociology of Religion*, 140-143.

<sup>25</sup> John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and His Critics* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 32.

<sup>26</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 18.

<sup>27</sup> Brian C. Macallan and Jurgens Hendriks, *Postfoundationalist Reflections in Practical Theology: A Framework for a Discipline in Flux* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 90.

*in Southern Ontario*.<sup>28</sup> The study focused on the educated middle class in southern Ontario as a group which, while exhibiting a history of disavowed religious involvement, appear to have the resources, desire, and capacity to retain religious sentiment in an individualized form. What these non-institutional religious individuals (and the diverse groups to which they belong) show us is that the concept of future religious development in post-secular Canadian society is not as chimerical as is sometimes thought.<sup>29</sup>

In the study, ten persons were interviewed at least once. All were individuals who met the inclusion criteria of self-identification as: 1) a Canadian citizen/permanent resident; 2) earning at least 30 000 \$ per annum as an individual or family unit (as a couple, adult child of parent/s, and/or with sibling/s); 3) having obtained some level of post-secondary education (though not necessarily culminating into the completion or award of a degree/diploma); and 4) being at least 18 years old at the time of the interview(s). The interviews were semi-structured and in-depth, i.e. they followed a general line of conversational questions pertaining to notions of 1) personal autonomy, 2) belonging to religious groups, 3) belonging to non-institutional religious or spiritual groups, 4) holding personal spiritual beliefs and/or taking part in collective action, and 5) believing in immaterial realities.

The rationale for limiting the study in this way is to allow for the emergence of a significant subset of the population in terms of spiritual involvement. For this knowledge to be known more clearly in scholarship on religion in Canada, I would like to suggest how a typology of these people is enlightening both in an empirically sociological sense, and also in a pneumatic, and thus missional, theological sense. Further comment on the specific methodology employed also follows in Chapter Two.

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<sup>28</sup> Some excerpts as well as the graphic analyses of the data are given in a concrete and accessible form throughout this manuscript and in Appendix G.

<sup>29</sup> Linda Woodhead in Paul Heelas, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 75.

## 1.4 Approaches and Problems from the Sociology of Religion

Sociologists have no issue theorizing the place of Canada as being in a state of medium tension between Europe and the U.S.A.<sup>30</sup> These macro level assertions must in some way be tested for validity on some smaller level, lest they remain in the realm of ‘pure’ theory. There is need here for interrelatedness of theory and practicality, as both must be embraced on some level.<sup>31</sup> A range of theorists have maintained that religion, far from disappearing from Western society, is rather changing, while on a global scale it can easily be said that there are more religious adherents alive and well than ever before in human history.<sup>32</sup> And even these developments do not exhaust the sphere of what has been termed ‘religious’ in the broad sense. In Canada, for instance, George Egerton has argued that belief in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms amounts to a new quasi-religious sentiment.<sup>33</sup> This seems especially relevant in light of the many people who stand under the banner of religious pluralism, which at least at the commonplace level is arguably an ideological by-product of the commodification of religion and spirituality. Indeed, in part, the concept of the post-secular has emerged as a way of attempting to describe these new developments in our culture.

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<sup>30</sup> Peter L. Berger, Grace Davie and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe?: A Theme and Variations* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 10.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Vive La Crise!: For Heterodoxy in Social Science,” *Theory and Society* 17, no. 5 (09/01, 1988), 774-775. doi:10.2307/657639. In Richard Jenkins terms, Bourdieu’s epistemological approaches aim to ground theory in practice wherever and whenever possible, Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 46.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.worldreligiondatabase.org> Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, *World Religion Database* (Leiden: Brill).

<sup>33</sup> George Egerton, “Trudeau, God, and the Canadian Constitution: Religion, Human Rights, and Government Authority in the Making of the 1982 Constitution,” in David Lyon and Marguerite Van Die, *Rethinking Church, State, and Modernity: Canada between Europe and America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 107-108; also see a useful discussion of many of Egerton’s points in Iain T. Benson, *The Freedom of Conscience and Religion in Canada: Challenges and Opportunities* (Atlanta, GA: Emory University School of Law, 2007a), 117-119.

At the same time, as the political philosopher John Gray has written, liberal thought in the West has “two faces,”<sup>34</sup> as monists and pluralists concerned with the same liberties cannot and will not agree on the most ethical secular position regarding religion(s). The sociology of religion is extremely influential within religious studies in the West, as is its varied devotion to the pluralism and tolerance fashionable in liberal circles of Gray's second variety (i.e., ideologically inclined pluralists in favour of the moral good implicit in a multiplicity of ways of life). Indeed, the value of materialistic and empirical analysis has been present in discourses on religion since the Enlightenment, and Gray's diagnosed monist strain of liberal thought can be traced back to Augustine. Is it even the task of a just yet *secular* society to concern itself at all with the multiplicity of religious ‘milieux’ we find in many Western societies?<sup>35</sup> Clearer answers may be visible by seeing Canadian society and religion from a post-secular perspective.

Regarding the academic study of religion, Aaron W. Hughes has recently written that “Theory and method have largely been used to appreciate religion and to uphold the positive and ecumenical character of the field,”<sup>36</sup> as opposed to endorsing theoretical critiques of all religion as such. While this thesis contributes to the so-called “appreciation” of religion, it certainly does not aim to “uphold the positive and ecumenical character of the field.” As a practical theology, the theoretical constructs developed are intended in a narrower, but more constructive way: to be taken as necessary building blocks to contemporary narrative, thus turning methodology into simply a means to a theological end. Methods themselves are not the source of subjective or objective truth, after all, and are merely media through which we arbitrate and evaluate truth claims. The intention is not, therefore, to contribute substantially to either

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<sup>34</sup> John Gray, *The Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 2.

<sup>35</sup> See S.J.D. Green in Grace Davie, Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas, *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular, and Alternative Futures* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2003), 253; cf. Alexis de Tocqueville, trans. Stephen D. Grant, *Democracy in America* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub., 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Aaron W. Hughes, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion: Twenty Five Years On* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2013), 11.

“positive” or “ecumenical” statements about religion in general, but to make a point about contemporary Canadian religious experience, and about how Christian theology might engage more constructively with Canadian people and society.

However important these questions may be for theologians, the question of how Canadians are managing to maintain individual belief systems without the authority and influence of the old institutions is also important socially and politically. In a secular state, the ways in which people deal with this very individualized problem are indicative of the pragmatic social and political realities of public and private life. Additionally, we must also ask how partakers in non-institutional religious groups could alter the wider social and political landscape in the near and distant future. Canadian society can then be seen as becoming what Jürgen Habermas has called the “post-secular” by its condition of remaining a place of religious belonging in the wake of secularization and the finality of modernization.<sup>37</sup>

While it is undeniable that the decline of institutional religion in the West is still occurring, as outlined in the secularization theses of scholars such as David Martin and Steve Bruce,<sup>38</sup> less centralized groups and their religious sentiments flourish. Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby has demonstrated quantitatively on a macro level that the secularization of Canada has resulted in a plurality of non-institutional religious belonging among Canadians.<sup>39</sup> The German sociologist Ulrich Beck has similarly identified the key phenomenon of individualized religion in the West, preparing the

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<sup>37</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, “A ‘Post-Secular’ Society - what does that Mean?” *Reset DOC (Dialogues on Civilization)*, Tuesday, 16 September, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> As in: Bruce, *God is Dead*; David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Reginald Wayne Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987); Reginald Wayne Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2002); Reginald Wayne Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993).

ground for more micro level research in order to detail and describe these developments.<sup>40</sup> What has been described by some scholars as the “spiritual turn”<sup>41</sup> in Western religion has meant that “ongoing relationships between spiritualities and religions” involve the interrelatedness of a large variety of religious traditions in a vast milieu.<sup>42</sup>

## 1.5 Theorizing Canada’s Place in the Secular World

Grace Davie sees (along with David Martin) a broad tendency for various theoretical approaches to become more useful to specific geographical areas.<sup>43</sup> The ability to study and measure the quantity of SBNR adherence has been a massive source of contention in recent literature. However, well researched efforts such as Grace Davie’s seminal study, *Inner City God*, provide a great deal of ground-work on the subject. She has written that “We need to look critically at the parameters of faith in our own corner of the world before we can (a) compare these with other global religions and (b) make sense of the long-term future.”<sup>44</sup> For his part, Ulrich Beck recently stated that the analysis of religion hinges on two principles: 1) to distinguish between analysis vs. practice of religion, and 2) between the understandings of religion held by believers vs. non-believers.<sup>45</sup> While Beck's motivation is not to be taken as normative for constructing theology, the basis of his claim is something that this study aims to acknowledge. In this way, we can perceive a veiled post-Christian ethos within the globalized and secular politics of the West.<sup>46</sup> Beck contends that the concept of non-linear secularization can be used to inform a theory of “multiple secularizations,” much in the same way that we may understand there

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<sup>40</sup> Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 90-91.

<sup>41</sup> Giuseppe Giordan and William H. Swatos, *Religion, Spirituality and Everyday Practice* (Dordrecht; New York: Springer, 2011), xi.

<sup>42</sup> Linda Woodhead in Swatos, *Religion Spirituality and Everyday Practice*, xii, 3-19.

<sup>43</sup> Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, 247.

<sup>44</sup> Grace Davie, *Europe, the Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 47-48

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

to be multiple forms of modernity. However, he also states: “that with increasing modernization, religions do not disappear but change their appearance.”<sup>47</sup> This, I shall argue, is what we can observe in contemporary PJCES: that as modernization continues the old religious institutions are definitely giving way to new non-institutional ‘autonomous’ spiritualities. In this sense Canada is far from a fully secularized state – indeed, it may soon form the benchmark for post-secular development.

Canada is neither clearly British nor American in its religious tastes, but also considering that it is at the same time not entirely unique some important corollaries are worth mentioning. Peter Berger understands Canadian culture as occupying the space between the U.S. versions of secularism and European versions of secularism.<sup>48</sup> This is, of course, a totalizing claim within a work of generalization and theory-based knowledge. As we shall see, by taking a closer look at one particular group of individuals bearing a certain social status, we get a much more defined picture. As stated by Bourdieu above, both theory and empirical observation are instrumental in understanding phenomena, including the religious, and in turn can help to inform us theologically.

This position takes seriously the “Spiritual Revolution Claim” of Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, which states, in simplified form, that: “subjective-life spirituality is growing and life-as religion is declining.”<sup>49</sup> The authors make an important attempt at quantifying emergent spiritualities, thus forming an alternative narrative to the ‘rationalization equals secularization’ mantra of modernity.<sup>50</sup> However, Woodhead and Heelas are clear that the tipping point, at which non-institutional spirituality would overtake the already decimated and still declining intuitional religions, has certainly not been realized or observed yet. David Voas and Steve Bruce’s rejoinder to the ‘spiritual

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>48</sup> Berger et al., *Religious America, Secular Europe?*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, 75.

<sup>50</sup> For the ‘opposing’ approach see Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

revolution' claim is that "Unconventional spirituality is a symptom of secularization, not a durable counterforce to it." While Bruce and Voas go on to concede that a secular future for spirituality movements may exist, it will certainly not overtake the already dilapidated practices of the institutional religions.<sup>51</sup> Although antithetical, these sociological claims are both extremely relevant.

Steve Bruce states that between 1851 and 1979, church attendance in Great Britain declined by anywhere from 28 to 48%.<sup>52</sup> The point is that this is a massive shift, and one that is *irreversible* according to orthodox secularization theory. Britain is not alone among North Atlantic countries in experiencing this sort of decline. The truth is that institutional religious 'belonging' is indeed in decline. But this is not the end of the story. Institutional 'efficacy,' if one may call to call it such, cannot be seen as a conclusive measure of spirituality, or indeed of the Christian faith and Christian theology, in a given society. Bruce states that "The critics of the secularization paradigm often distort the argument by imputing to the 'secularizationists' the view that the pre-industrial past was a 'golden age of faith'." Yet what Bruce is unable to concede is probably the Achilles heel to all rationalization and secularizations theories, and the weakness here is that secularization theory, having attained status quo reception among social scientists, itself must be critiqued for its imposition of legitimacy.

In light of the sources cited about, this diagram is fashioned upon Peter Berger's concept of "Eurosecularity,"<sup>53</sup> where the *x*-axis represents the value of Eurosecularity on the right, and where the *y* represents the value of cultural capital based on social stratification<sup>54</sup>:

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<sup>51</sup> Steve Bruce and David Voas in eds. Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp, *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 43.

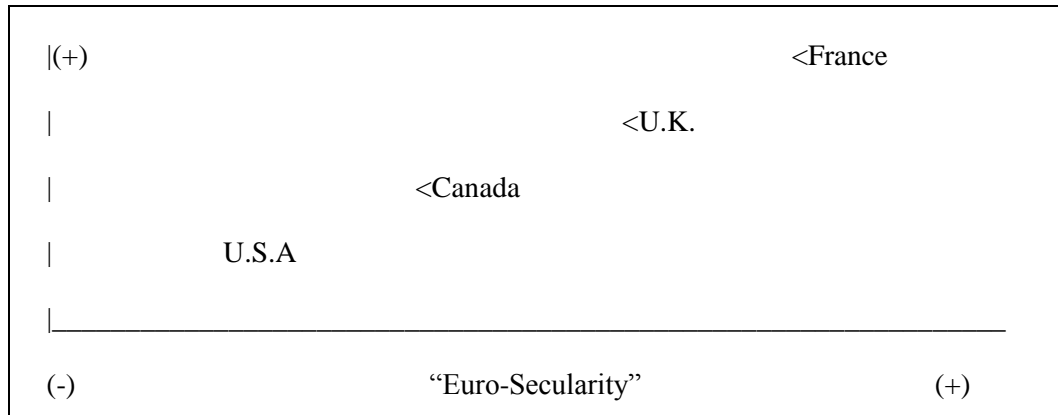
<sup>52</sup> Steve Bruce in Davie et al., *Predicting Religion*, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Berger, *Religious America Secular Europe*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984)128-129.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Chart of ‘Eurosecularity’ as Represented in Sociological Literature on Contemporary Religion after Secularization**



Thus, as one can see above, the essentialism of the equation of “euro-secularity” with cultural capital is largely invalid. Which population forms the gold standard? A population in Western Europe in its cultural secularism or one in North America in all of its religiosity? The above chart does not even account for American cultural capital located on the East-West coastal cosmopolitans, which forms the intelligentsia of the upper class. Thus, this arm of social research remains inconclusive regarding Canadian religious practices.

It is equally possible to argue that we have here a view of two sides of the same coin, with Bruce stressing American exceptionalism, and with Grace Davie and David Martin arguing European exceptionalism on the opposite grounds of the secularization phenomenon not being universal, and thus being localized in a Western European context. Of course, when viewed together both have exceptional variables which are not explainable based on comparison. Thus the analysis of this thesis will *not* focus on the faulty distinctions made between Western European secularization and the so-called American exceptionalism of religious revival and development in the U.S.A. and beyond. This analysis will not ‘counteract’ the data available to sociologists at the macro level, but nevertheless, smaller scale, grounded-theoretical approaches have the potential by their very nature to yield results entirely variant from the large scale. I suggest that such smaller scale analysis lends itself well to the task of practical theological reflection in the case of SBNR adherents in Southern Ontario.

## 1.6 Ways of Conceiving the Task(s) of Practical Theology

The Dutch theologian Gerben Heitink describes practical theology as something that “[...] should be understood as an empirically descriptive and critically constructive theory of religious practice.”<sup>55</sup> Connected to this description of practical theology, the vastly influential German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher was particularly right about one thing: religion has become unfashionable,<sup>56</sup> and has remained so in much of the intellectual consciousness from the late eighteenth century up until now. The difference from his day to ours is mainly that religion has taken a hidden shift from its traditional institutional legitimacy into post-Christian forms of individual spirituality in the West. Walter Wyman notes that “It was Schleiermacher’s consistent insistence, from the *Speeches* onward, that doctrines are secondary, the product of reflection upon piety.”<sup>57</sup> What exactly Schleiermacher probably meant in focusing heavily on this notion of piety (Ger. *Frömmigkeit*) may not be entirely accessible today in a post-Christian context. Still, piety as personal faith, which causes one to practice beliefs as an individual, is certainly what is meant when anyone makes reference to ‘autonomous religion.’ Schleiermacher felt that “Theology was the daughter of religion” and not *vice versa*,<sup>58</sup> essentially meaning that piety – including, by extension, what I have referred to as PJCES – is *prior* to doctrinal systematization in the form of theology, dogma, or ecclesial legitimacy.

Karl Barth, in constructing his lectures at Göttingen against the legacy of Schleiermacher, criticized Schleiermacher’s privileging of *practical* theology over

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<sup>55</sup> Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), xvi.

<sup>56</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, trans. John Oman, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (London: K. Paul, Trench, 1893), passim, though the “First Speech” in particular is relevant here.

<sup>57</sup> Sockness and Gräb, *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue*, Vol. Bd. 148 (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 195.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

*historical* theology.<sup>59</sup> Barth clearly expressed his dissatisfaction with Schleiermacher's schema, insofar that it "leaves unclear the distinction between philosophical and historical theology."<sup>60</sup> This criticism made by Barth and others "is directed against the absolute dependency of theology on ethics, which is obvious throughout the schema and which is mediated by the borrowed discipline called philosophical theology."<sup>61</sup>

However, Barth's criticism does not dismantle the overall need or task of practical theology. Instead, justifiable criticisms can serve as a system of 'checks and balances' by which to measure the value and appropriation of such a task. Our day is quite different from Schleiermacher's, and is indeed also requiring of us vastly different answers than even the theological genius found in Barth's writings and sermons can offer. Yet, the freedom of the Christian church to form an alternate narrative to society's and the popular piety found in the form of new spiritualities are both still concerns for us today. Furthermore, the institutional churches of twenty-first century Canada have barely any ecumenical character by which to claim dogmatic authority, mostly because of rampant denominationalism.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, many have seen autonomous religion as forming a superior alternate narrative in light of the spiritual failures of the Church.

George Lindbeck pointed out in *The Nature of Doctrine* that the responses to Kant's "reduction of God to a transcendental condition" have been reasoned with intellectually by such religious luminaries as Schleiermacher, through to Rudolf Otto, and

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<sup>59</sup> Karl Barth and Dietrich Ritschl, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 146.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, fn 34; One also notices Barth's play on words in this passage by including the famous dictum of "the feeling of absolute dependence" in a context rather different than Schleiermacher's famous use of the same phrase. Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), §4.4, 16-18.

<sup>62</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr wrote that denominationalism "represents the accommodation of Christianity to the caste-system of human society" in the classic sociological text *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 6.

Mircea Eliade.<sup>63</sup> Instead of fully accepting these, Lindbeck calls for a recognition of the “basic problem” with the aforementioned approaches to religion as being what sociologists Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger have called the “deobjectification” of religion and doctrine.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, even if doctrinal systems of the Christian religion are failing, spirituality is conversely alive and well, and can be discerned in our society.<sup>65</sup> However, this modern spirituality in the West can be seen as representing the commodification of the former place of religion – an implication of the downfall of the latter so well put by Schleiermacher all those years ago – and shifting piety from concern for the material world’s needs into fragmented concerns with one’s own personal experience as the ultimate reality. Schleiermacher’s legacy, as we read from Barth above, has also been seen as the original genesis of practical theology.<sup>66</sup>

One way of explaining this spiritual transition from institution to individual is by understanding the notion of “Implicit Religion.” Edward Bailey has reflected on the effort to define this term:

[W]e could call Implicit Religion, or “IR,” an “empirical idea.” It’s a theory (and I mean “theory,” in the full, original sense of “wondering”). It is more of a question or a suggestion, than an ideology or a presumption, about our understanding of the non-mechanistic dimension within human being; the dimension that includes sometimes being inspired with wonder (and so sometimes reduced to silence), as well as being invited to wonder, intellectually (and so to explore the numerous possibilities of meaning, within life).<sup>67</sup>

Concerning the category of implicit religion, however, much theology is still silent. However, Augustine famously derided the idea that one could have ‘direct evidence’ of

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<sup>63</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 21.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> James Sweeney in Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward, *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), 23.

<sup>66</sup> Macallan and Jurgens Hendriks, *Postfoundationalist Reflections in Practical Theology*, 50; cf. Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Bailey, “Implicit Religion,” 196; Grace Davie also refers to what Bailey calls the religious “implications” of modern life in *Inner City God*, 69.

the faith of others.<sup>68</sup> If we cannot tell if others have faith, we have to begin our own questions subjectively and internally, much in the same way in which Augustine reasoned his way into the ‘Latin’ version of Trinitarian theology, and into the philosophy of the mind (*mens*).

The mind, with its desires, is an important place to begin, as Augustine showed us, since it is the source of our understanding of reality. For contemporary Westerners, the meaningless nature of desire for consumption in the modern world as seen in the effects of mass media adverts<sup>69</sup> lends itself to the understanding that death is somehow avoidable. Yet the system of supply and demand offers no release from the cycle of effort and death. From Jürgen Moltmann’s reflections on the thought of Miguel de Unamuno, the problem and paradox of death *can only be* a theological one:

‘The tragic sense of life’ is a fundamental existential experience, for it is the experience of the death of human existence. ‘Life is a tragedy, and a tragedy is a perpetual struggle without victory or hope of victory – simply a contradiction.’ Everything living is involved in this contradiction and is only alive as long as it is involved in it.<sup>70</sup>

The nihility of life, then, is to never achieve one’s desired ends. Albert Camus sought to dispense with this very question: he found life to be essentially a struggle against suicide, against the absurd nature of life<sup>71</sup> to which Moltmann has also referred. To counter this nihilism, faith – whether secular or religious – must become involved in the process.

The problems of modernity, namely that of purpose and meaning prior to biological death, are also ancient problems, and are the same which plagued *Qoheleth* in

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<sup>68</sup> Augustine, trans. Gareth B. Matthews, *On the Trinity: Books 8-15* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 107-109.

<sup>69</sup> Alexander Bard and Jan Söderqvist, *Netocracy: The New Power Elite and Life After Capitalism* (London: Reuters, 2002), 140.

<sup>70</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 37; it is here that he explicitly references this concept from Miguel de Unamuno and Salvador de Madariaga, *Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 17.

<sup>71</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (London: Hamilton, 1983), 6; cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 701.

Ecclesiastes.<sup>72</sup> However, just how far can we stretch our biblical wisdom in light of modern problems? And likewise, are we content with the current possibility that it cannot satisfy completely the issues of modernity? Theologians must be open to the possibilities. Guy Debord cited Feuerbach's preface to *The Essence of Christianity*<sup>73</sup> before beginning his own critique of the modern idealisms, which began with these two statements:

1. In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.
2. The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world apart, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.<sup>74</sup>

If the problems of modernity, namely an augmented sense of the absurd nihilism of secular life, still haunts human consciousness, there is indeed room for a post-secular spiritual life, and the participants in my interview study confirm this at the micro level. However, much more important to us is not *if* they do this, but *how* they do this. The fairly recent publication of the manifesto-of-sorts known as *The Coming Insurrection* is a case in point, reflecting the pulse of the disenfranchised and disenchanting under late global capitalism generally:

Two centuries of capitalism and market nihilism have brought us to the most extreme alienations – from ourselves, from others, from worlds. The fiction of the individual has decomposed at the same speed that it was becoming real.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:2-4.

<sup>73</sup> “But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence... illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.” Ludwig Feuerbach, trans. George Eliot, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: C. Blanchard, 1855).

<sup>74</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995; 1994), 1.

<sup>75</sup> Comité Invisible, *The Coming Insurrection*, Vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2009), 16.

Half a century earlier, Jean Meynaud, commenting on the reality of technologically prescribed life, stated: “During recent years, progress in cybernetics<sup>76</sup> has made a new contribution to anti-political thought, which would result ultimately in handing over the fate of mankind to government by machine.”<sup>77</sup> These reflections partly describe the current social situation in the Western world and indeed in all of the world where the grandiose commodification of both religion and spiritual life is taking place.<sup>78</sup> It is also the context within which the fragmented response of the SBNR and of PJCES generally occurs.

In order to constructively encounter current spirituality, I will suggest here that we might approach the realm of the post-secular via one of its somewhat more surprising – though not completely unexpected – proponents, the social theorist Jürgen Habermas. Habermas has begun in recent years to make more and more allowances for the role of the metaphysical in rational discourses in the West generically. Some of his more recent efforts have placed a stronger emphasis on the concept of the spiritual life, as secular reason has yet to formulate a legitimate alternative or replacement for the former place of religion.<sup>79</sup> Some recent theological commentary on Habermas by theologian Christopher Brittain illustrates the viability thus afforded to religious discourses as ‘post-metaphysical.’<sup>80</sup> In this sense Brittain has argued that Habermas is now “Re-occupying Horkheimer's [metaphysical] Position,” with Horkheimer's logic being such that “to seek to salvage an unconditional meaning without God is futile.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, as Brittain suggests, Habermas is willing to return to the roots of the Frankfurt school and re-engage religious

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<sup>76</sup> A concept found in Martin Heidegger, trans. David Farrell Krell, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964)* (London: Routledge Classics, 2011), 373ff.

<sup>77</sup> Jean Meynaud, *Technocracy* (N.Y.: Free Press, 1969), 207.

<sup>78</sup> Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 150-154.

<sup>79</sup> Jürgen Habermas, trans. Ciaran Cronin, *An Awareness of what is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Cambridge, U.K.; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 15-23.

<sup>80</sup> Christopher Craig Brittain, “A Religious Repair for Communicative Reason? Habermas's Return to Religion and its Theological Reception,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 30, no. 2 (2014), 181.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

philosophy as a means to an end. However, from Brittain's perspective, Habermas theologically represents a path by which to approach the formerly inaccessible metaphysics of Frankfurt School founders Horkheimer and Adorno: the real potential theological partners, for whom Habermas is merely intermediary.

While scholars such as Marc Lalonde have rightly argued that a truly 'critical theology' cannot actually exist<sup>82</sup> – echoing Habermas' own claim – this does not place any more or any fewer constraints on the conception of a practical theology in general. The introduction of sociological theory and qualitative methods connects with my own approach stemming from theology, which can perhaps be seen as paradoxical, but is indeed justifiable in the view of the question posed. This kind of project is sometimes met with suspicion, not only from sociologists as such, but also from some theologians. Most dramatically, perhaps, John Milbank has argued that theology is confined by secular reason, and not enabled by it.<sup>83</sup> This claim is somewhat extreme, and it is possible that the problem of this particular reductionism may be countered in what Habermas and others have termed the 'post-secular.'<sup>84</sup> In fact, I wish to argue with John Swinton and Harriet Mowat that the two approaches were never fundamentally incompatible, so long as the point of each is preserved and the two are not confused.<sup>85</sup>

A very clear definition for practical theological method, indeed, though the discipline is not wholly based in method,<sup>86</sup> can be found in John Swinton and Harriet Mowat's efforts to synthesize the diversity of the practical-theological approach to

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<sup>82</sup> As in Marc P. Lalonde, *Critical Theology and the Challenge of Jürgen Habermas: Toward a Critical Theory of Religious Insight*, (New York: P. Lang, 1999).

<sup>83</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 3.

<sup>84</sup> John Milbank, *What Lacks is Feeling: Hume versus Kant and Habermas*, in eds. Craig J. Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, *Habermas and Religion*, 2013), 322-323.

<sup>85</sup> John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), vi.

<sup>86</sup> This point is argued well by Terry A. Velting in *Practical Theology: On Earth as it is in Heaven* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005), 15.



phenomenological research. Their position can initially be summarized in four affirmative statements:

[1] Practical Theology [...] is dedicated to enabling the faithful performance of the gospel and to exploring and taking seriously the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God. [...]

[2] Practical Theology takes seriously the idea of performing the faith<sup>87</sup> and seeks to explore the nature and in particular the faithfulness of that performance. [...]

[3] Practical Theology recognises and respects the diversity of interpretation within the various expositions of the performed gospel and seeks to ensure and encourage the Christian community to remain faithful to the narrative of the original God-given plot of the gospel and to practise faithfully as that narrative unfolds. [4] Practical Theology therefore finds itself located within the uneasy but critical tension between the script of revelation given to us in Christ and formulated historically within scripture, doctrine and tradition, and the continuing innovative performance of the gospel as it is *embodied and enacted in the life and practices of the Church as they interact with the life and practices of the world*.<sup>88</sup> [emphases mine]

All this, however, is mainly derivative of what has *already* taken place within many contexts in practical theology generally. More specifically, Swinton and Mowat propose that a working definition of a current approach to practical theology would read like this: “Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.”<sup>89</sup> To *do* practical theology, therefore, requires that a certain attention be given to the *world*, and this is what creates space in the present context for our own appeal to the sociological method.

Nonetheless, for all the merits of the practical theological method, the main problem with actually *writing* up any practical theological research is the resulting imperative of *doing* interdisciplinary theology. This is a problem already pondered years ago by the great German Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner.<sup>90</sup> The need for taking this

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<sup>87</sup> As per Stanley Hauerwas, "Bonhoeffer: The Truthful Witness," <http://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/interviews/hauerwas.asp> (accessed 05/15, 2015).

<sup>88</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Methods*, 4-5.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>90</sup> Aaron J. Ghiloni, "On Writing Interdisciplinary Theology," *Practical Theology* 6, no. 1 (04/01, 2013), 24.

difficult step is, however, clear theologically. Aaron Ghiloni suggests that an interdisciplinary approach to theology is called for today, and a consequent “renunciation” of over-specialization in particular sub-fields of the theological disciplines, primarily on missional grounds.<sup>91</sup> To quote Swinton and Mowat once more, what we need in theology is “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world,”<sup>92</sup> in order to reflexively consider the fact that what ‘goes on’ in much of Christian thought and life in the modern world is not ‘what is really going on’ according to a more materialist sensibility.<sup>93</sup>

The above position, while positive and constructive, can be seen as slightly nebulous epistemologically. Why this knowledge should be valued either in the ecclesia or the academy is not *entirely* clear, and it is more basically just assumed to be in line with Church practice. This skeptical place is perhaps not a bad stance theologically, especially in light of John Milbank’s important reflections on the matter, but we could perhaps benefit from spelling out in a more forthright way how the practical theological approach *grounds* its theory/theology.

We can make a start here with a slightly more theoretical work than Swinton and Mowat’s, a book entitled *Postfoundationalist Reflections in Practical Theology*, by theologian Brian C. Macallan, who provides the following definition of the field: “A postfoundationalist practical theology is a reflection on the given life of experiences of people in their individual, church, societal and ecological dimensions.”<sup>94</sup> “Foundationalism” has taken on a pejorative meaning, especially after the effects of Richard Rorty’s criticism of philosophers’ “[...] searching for a metaphorical mirror

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Theology and Qualitative Methods*, 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>94</sup> Macallan, *Postfoundationalist Reflections in Practical Theology*, 45.

which would reflect reality.”<sup>95</sup> However, from Macallan’s theological perspective, post-modernism’s absolute of no absolutism is itself a foundational claim, and what is more, he likens it to biblical foundationalism on the part of much Christian theology claiming *the* or *a* biblical worldview and thus ‘right’ interpretation. Thus, the kind of postfoundationalist theory for practical theology that Macallan suggests is connected with the ‘social democratic’ potential of postfoundationalism in general.<sup>96</sup>

Furthermore, F. LeRon Shults has proposed what he terms “The Four Couplets of Postfoundationalism” as “an emerging model of theological rationality,” which taken together form an “‘ideal type’ postfoundationalist”:

(1) interpreted experience engenders and nourishes all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience; (2) the objective unity of truth is a necessary condition for the intelligible search for knowledge, and the subjective multiplicity of knowledge indicates the fallibility of truth claims; (3) rational judgement is an activity of socially situated individuals, and the cultural community indeterminately meditates the criteria of rationality; (4) explanation aims for universal, transcontextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations.<sup>97</sup>

Whether or not postfoundationalism is the only perspective from which practical theology can be epistemologically grounded is well beyond the scope of this thesis. However, what is clear is that practical theology is contextual theology. This task, then, is not undertaken for the sake of doing practical theology itself, as none of the definitions above suffice to construct a case for theology. ‘Practical’ theology is much more a means to an end, and in our case here, as a bridge to post-secular understandings of spirituality.

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<sup>95</sup> “Foundationalism,” in Noel Castree, Alisdair Rogers and Rob Kitchen, *A Dictionary of Human Geography*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), online; cf. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

<sup>96</sup> Postfoundationalism as supports the need for communal meanings in the absence of objective truth(s). Mark Bevir, “Postfoundationalism and Social Democracy.,” *Teorema* 20, no. 1 (01, 2001), 69.

<sup>97</sup> F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 43.

This post-secular concept in social theory comes from within Jurgen Habermas' attempt at "Practical discourse and communicative ethics," as outlined here by J. Donald Moon:

Habermas has presented one of the most powerful accounts of discourse-based morality; it is grounded in an understanding of practical reason which explains how the validity of norms can be tested, thereby demonstrating their cognitive character. [...] valid norms can be freely accepted by all of the individuals who are affected by them. Thus, a society whose institutions and practices were governed by valid norms would instantiate the ideal of a moral community.<sup>98</sup>

This aspect of Habermas' theorizing in general has attracted both theological embrace and criticism, which again is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the salient point here is that all religious truth claims must be effectively 'managed,' since as far as Habermas is concerned, competing religious concerns cannot be settled from religious reasoning, and must be settled by secular reason alone.<sup>99</sup> He thus makes three imperatives upon religious people in post-secular society, in describing "epistemic" needs: first, the imperative towards tolerating other religions; second, towards grasping the secular knowledge of "modern scientific experts"; and third, the embedding of "egalitarian individualism of modern natural law and universalistic morality" into preexisting doctrine.<sup>100</sup> Again, we see here a basis for responsible discourse signaled in practice, but in this case with Habermas religion itself is not muzzled in any particular way.

As another point of clarification, it should be suggested that a post-secular theology is not somehow disengaged or disentangled from the overtly secular influences placed on much modern theology that has come before it. It also does not suggest that one can move theology into a sort of neo-apostolic direction, i.e. that there can be a return to a former and purer form of theology closer to the early Christian communities – no such return is possible. Rather, the post-secular turn can only become something

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<sup>98</sup> J. Donald Moon in ed. Stephen K. White, *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 143.

<sup>99</sup> Jürgen Habermas, trans. Ciaran Cronin, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2008), 135.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

meaningful after secular life has done its part in honing the theological projects we have already inherited. Therefore theology cannot be secular, neither can secular reason be theological – yet post-secular theology is clearly an amalgamation of both forms of rationality, as is necessary in this particular moment. One piece of this puzzle, theologically, will come from the theology of the Spirit, and what can possibly be made of this ancient notion today. To put this another way, the binary thinking of the German Idealist tradition still applies to the post-secular: freedom/perfection/spirit is what is ‘noumenal,’ while capital/sin/material is always what is ‘phenomenal.’ This paradox is real for secular thinkers as much as it is for Christians.

The fact is that what we call ‘spirituality’ is thriving in the modern world. Robert Wuthnow’s work, entitled *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*, argues that contemporary spirituality is hidden by an ethos of private practice.<sup>101</sup> Wuthnow’s claim is conditioned heavily by the culture of North American individualism, which most often privileges subjective freedom above all forms of objective, or secular, rationality. Out of it can come a preference for pluralism, through which, as it were, the free individual gets what he or she chooses. This is certainly the position argued for by John Hick, the important twentieth century philosopher of religion.<sup>102</sup> However, from a sociological perspective, this unabashedly modern favouring of pluralism must have a root cause which is initially concealed from us. Why is pluralism, and not simply toleration, seen as an ideologically good and necessary thing for modern secular societies?<sup>103</sup> One answer is that pluralism, as a *modus vivendi*, is economically savvy for the business of commodifying religious impulse, and individualizing it to the point of customization of the sacred and personal conceptions of divinity. In a post-secular

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<sup>101</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), vii.

<sup>102</sup> See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 13-14, 15; A newer (though entirely less intellectual) Canadian version of the Christian theology of religions has recently been put forth by William H. Harrison, fittingly entitled *In Praise of Mixed Religion: The Syncretism Solution in a Multifaith World* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>103</sup> Harrison, *In Praise of Mixed Religion*, passim. There is scarcely a chapter or subsection of this book that does not commit to the view that that pluralism must be accepted as a constant ‘good.’

society where traditional religion is not understood, due to the desired impetus to conduct autonomous spirituality, commodification of religious impulse thrives.

This has occurred as the state of religion in Canada, as in most Western societies, has undergone immense shifts over the last half century, especially from the perspective of traditional Christian institutions themselves. The burgeoning of the academic discipline of ‘Religious Studies,’ or what was in the past referred to as ‘the science(s) of the religions,’ has barely achieved any foothold among the “cultured despisers” of the Christian religion.<sup>104</sup> In regards to this reality, theologian Nicholas Lash writes that “We underestimate at our peril the comprehensiveness of the ignorance of Christianity in contemporary Western cultures.”<sup>105</sup> By attempting the task of studying religion from an objective lens via social scientific methodology, one can see the profound and continuing impact of Christianity despite the vast religious ocean we now have access to in the West.<sup>106</sup> Experiences of private religion among educated people in the middle class appear on the surface as variegated, but we can still see aspects of Christianity in them, which suggests that latent forms of post-secular Christianity remain alive. Paul Tillich’s mid-twentieth century thesis that religion is “ultimate concern”<sup>107</sup> will thus still prove extremely useful in this connection, since it allows us to speak of a continuing dynamic of Christian faith without its necessarily involving an outward participation in its ritual expression.

What has been suggested in the above chapter, then, is a plainly reflexive yet practical account of why I shall argue that practical theology *must actually be practised*. This itself seems like an obvious enough claim, and would be so in general if not for the inherent intellectual and spiritual difficulties this approach presents. However, within the

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<sup>104</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 1-2.

<sup>105</sup> Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech, and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2004), 3.

<sup>106</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>107</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 11-12.

limits of this thesis, I aim to begin to deal with these difficulties in an integral way as interdisciplinary and complementary means to an end, clarifying methodological approaches from an already diverse discipline as a way of actually contributing constructively to the advance of this knowledge. I have thus suggested that theologians make use of sociological methods to uncover more about what it means for people to encounter God: something which has been in some cases maligned,<sup>108</sup> if not generally ignored, throughout much of the theology of the twentieth century (and beyond). What follows in the next chapters is intended to be an exercise in such a practical theology, and as such, it will adhere to this somewhat singular form of practical theological method. The goal is to contribute in some small way to the question of theological method, and to Christian Pneumatology, as well as generate some specific reflection on the current phenomenon of PJCES.

Before moving on, however, two clarifications may be in order, the first about the use of the term ‘practical theology,’ and the second about the appeal to pneumatology in this thesis. Firstly, practical theology means, for our purposes, a method of approaching theology which makes explicit use of social theory and social scientific methods, in this case to discover more about what people think about their own spiritual lives and about God’s relationship to them. Secondly, as pneumatology is the primary tool I use for theologically interpretive purposes, it is important at the outset to qualify what follows. The point is not to impose some sort of Christian ‘legitimacy’ upon non-Christian sources. Instead, the goal ought to be understood as more humble, and as something basically dialogical: fundamentally, it is to learn from these narratives, and to suggest that Christian theology in particular can learn from them. This is not to say that such narratives cannot be interpreted differently — for instance, in secular, post-Christian or non-Christian ways — but for the purposes of this thesis, the goal is to outline a possible Christian theological response to them, which obviously assumes that such an interpretation can be of value.

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<sup>108</sup> See again Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3.





## Chapter 2

### 2 The Use of Sociological Theory and Qualitative Methods in the Study of Religion and Spirituality

#### 2.1 Qualitative Interview Methodology

In conducting the interviews for this study into spirituality I wanted to discover if my selection of people felt personally separated from traditional religion, and, by extension, if they also felt separated from other non-institutional spiritual adherents in general. Upon confirming a detachment from institutions, I needed to find out why this was the case, and why these otherwise like-minded individuals did indeed feel fragmented from *each other*. The narratives of the interviewees expressed a desire for autonomy, but how could this sense of autonomy be achieved and maintained outside the social bonds of institutional religion? What I discovered was that there is a residual and even copious potential for so-called ‘autonomous selves’ to unite around communal ends, since what is currently lacking is a theoretical forum in which to communicate these desires. However, one cannot downplay the massive *personal* need for autonomy present in these narratives, and it certainly forms the context by which all of this data can be interpreted.

Interviews were conducted with the ten interlocutors within the limit of one hour of time, and were recorded for subsequent transcription. All transcriptions were done manually, with the aids of transcription software and related instruments. This process first involved asking the interviewee some qualifying questions at the beginning. These included queries regarding identification, income, occupation, level of education, etc. The necessary qualifying questions, in all cases, then gave way to the first topic of interest, and in keeping with the practice of in-depth interviewing, this involved both working from a sheet of guided questions (see Appendix E), as well as fully allowing the interviewee to pursue any avenue of discussion whatsoever during the talk. The first topic of interest was individual spirituality, juxtaposed with personal opinions of institutional religion, and from this point onwards there was an understanding that any interviewee might digress into a variety of anecdotes, reflections, and comments on personal history. However, the prescription for maintaining some level of guidance

concerning the subject areas outlined on the guided questions sheet did bring about a certain loose uniformity in the general progression of all of the interviews.

### 2.1.1 Sample Selection Rationale

As stated above, participants were required to self-identify as having completed some level of post-secondary education, as well as earning over 30 000\$ per year as an individual or a family unit. The purpose behind enforcing these selection criteria was to identify a subset which could loosely be classified as *educated middle-class*. One can allow that the term ‘middle-class’ in the twenty first century Western hemisphere has come to mean something different than what the founding theorists of sociology, i.e. Marx, Weber and Durkheim, probably understood this concept to mean. In what follows, the designator ‘educated middle-class’ is mainly used to denote the fact that the individuals in the study belong to a strata of society which is (at least slightly) economically more independent and ‘prosperous’ than another large portion of Canadians who are understood to possess lower levels of economic and cultural capital.

In reflecting upon this reality, it is not claimed here that there is a causal link between cultural and economic capital in Canada. The claim, rather, is that a correlation does exist between individuals in Canadian society who have sufficient material resources (money, time, property, transportation: i.e. economic capital) and learned resources (knowledge, education, languages, institutional theology: i.e. cultural capital) to engage in personal and group oriented autonomous religion, and to engage at some level in reflective, theological consideration of spiritual doctrines.

Most of this stratum of Canadian society (middle-class, educated, Anglophone) typically reside within a two hundred kilometre range of the border with the U.S.A., which is a geographical and economic necessity for most urban and sub-urban Canadians. None of the ten interviewees could be said to be ‘rural’ in the Canadian context, which is significant because the ‘post-secular’ phenomenal space is generally theorized in an

urban context.<sup>109</sup> The limiting here based on education levels, as criterion for inclusion in the study, means that my sample has been bracketed to people who have self-identified as having done some post-secondary education. The participants also must either have been Canadian citizens, or permanent residents, at the time of the interview in order for the research to be classified as relevant to a Canadian context. As a final note of clarification, the participants also had to be over the age of eighteen.

### 2.1.2 Coding Schema and Data Analysis

Data were coded according to a two-step process for the purposes of generating a ‘grounded-theoretical’ approach to the data set. First, upon the initial first cycle through the interviews the method known as “structural,” or “holistic”<sup>110</sup> coding was used in order to generate the overall initial analytical response to the narratives of the interlocutors. The fruits of this step in the process are detailed under section 2.2. The aspirations of the participants have suggested, in and by this particular rendering, two possible types emerging from this sample of spiritual adherents: 1) the “inclusive-seeker” (henceforth referred to as IS) and 2) the “spiritual-political activist” (henceforth SPA).

Second cycle coding in this case involved the distinct categorization of the primary coding results, culminating first in a more general sense and eventually developing a more specific rendering of the narratives of the interlocutors.<sup>111</sup> After this stage, by “theming”<sup>112</sup> the data, I was able to first identify the more surface level consistencies between the different narratives, as well as secondarily differentiate between these same themes within the individual narratives of the interviewees in terms of narrative content. The fruits of this secondary effort can be viewed in section 2.3.

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<sup>109</sup> Arie L. Molendijk, Justin Beaumont and Christoph Jedan, *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban*, Vol. 13 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 158.

<sup>110</sup> Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 48.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-145.

## 2.2 General Findings from Interview Analysis

Table 1 below demonstrates the presence of basic themes in the narratives of the participants, and these will be used to ground a theoretical approach to the PJCES of the participants. The themes are shown as they were evidence in the interviews, albeit in a simplified form: whether that particular concern was ‘primary’ or ‘secondary.’ The mere presence of these themes will be used here to suggest not a binary, but a nevertheless marked pattern of differentiation between two types within the group of ten interviewees. A correlation emerges in which the narratives of SPAs show a noticeable difference in terms of what different forms of autonomy mean to them, in their expressed language. Thus, these types actually have more in common than not, though this point is not the object of study here. The point here is the differentiation between the more typical IS type from the more specialized narratives of the SPA type. The SPA demonstrates less of some features, but a heightened sense of others, and on this point the level of differentiation will be further qualified in section 2.3. Again, these people can largely be described as ‘same yet different’ in regards to the hypothesized presence of PJCES. The types themselves are purely hypothetical and ideal, as (presumably) any hermeneutically constructed analysis of discourse/narrative would be expected to yield. Also, it should be mentioned that the typological divisions themselves come from the next stage of coding (SPA vs. IS), yet are included here for convenience, to show where emergent initial themes overlapped.

**Table 1: First Stage of Coding**

PRIMARY/SECONDARY CONCERNS IN INTERVIEWS	SPIRITUAL-POLITICAL ACTIVIST	INCLUSIVE SEEKER
Consumer-based spirituality	secondary	primary
Religious collectivization	primary	secondary
Desire for mystical reality	primary	secondary
Desire for alternative spiritual system catered to individual	secondary	primary
Fragmentation of Society	primary	secondary
Individualization	primary	primary
Community	secondary	primary

Active political/public life	primary	secondary
Private spirituality	primary	primary
Anti-Institutional Rhetoric	primary	primary
Personally created Beliefs	primary	primary
Realized Autonomy	primary	primary
Theological constructs	primary	secondary
Pluralism	secondary	primary
Contextual Awareness of social action	primary	secondary
Institutional Religion	secondary	secondary
Spiritual Awareness	primary	primary
Intangible/immaterial ‘reality’	primary	primary
High awareness of other like-minded individuals/groups	primary	secondary

One can see that the differentiation represented (see Appendix A for an alternate depiction) is primarily around these themes as points of contention for “inclusive seekers” vs. the more highly differentiated and specialized category of “spiritual-political activists”. Neither type feels a need for institutional guidance. Yet the SPA exhibits a clearly defined emphases on action, whereas the more vague notions of autonomy amongst the seekers do not culminate in a sense of empowerment via action and instead have contemplation as a focus. This claim will be nuanced in the following section.

Appendix G contains just a few of the many things participants in the study contributed to this conversation on contemporary spirituality. Much could be made of this alone, and the excerpts quoted are just a sample of the whole. As such, all of the participants clearly prefer to maintain strict personal notions of autonomy, while at the same time some would be open to some form of community among like-minded individuals *if given a forum for doing so* (as hypothesized in Appendix B). However, the spectre of institutional hierarchy lingers in the background of these narratives, and the interviewees themselves express skepticism as to whether this could actually occur. This is where I theorize, given the potential for a post-secular Canada, that the Habermasian

concept of “communicative action”<sup>113</sup> can have a role in the collectivization of such spirituality. I also reflect theologically that the commonalities between non-institutional spiritual people and institutionally religious people are so similar as actually to allow for a shared understanding of the Spirit.

However, there is a broad anti-religious tendency across all of the interlocutors’ narratives that suggests at first sight a simple binary structure: institutional “religion” = bad (“morbid-minded”) vs. non-institutional “spirituality” = good (“healthy-minded”).<sup>114</sup> While this simple binary is much too basic to generalize across more varied expressions of SBNR people, it is represented at some level in the PJCES narratives from my study. This poses something of an impasse towards communicative rationality between these idealized groupings. However, on closer scrutiny the narratives also evidence a more complicated sort of spirituality than simply being ‘non-institutional,’ and are not exactly of the healthy-minded (natural or revealed) religion that William James famously outlined over a century ago. A crucial aspect would appear to be that PJCES commits to minimal doctrine, and thereby can be marketed in infinite and variegated forms, enough so that almost everyone can find some aspect to ‘buy into,’ with the caveat that institutional religion is denied all legitimacy. One example of this from my own research comes from a young woman who describes her transition, mostly while undergoing university studies, from her family’s traditional faith into largely Metis-indigenous forms of spirituality:

*in my early adult life in university I stopped going to church [...] I started to kinda explore other faiths, other spirituality, and found it much harder to say that I’m a Catholic and I’m a part of this church. It was just like a lot didn’t come easily anymore, if at all.*

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<sup>113</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action vol. I*, xlii. Habermas states that: “The concept of communicative action is developed in [...] a theory of modernity that explains the type of social pathologies that are today becoming increasingly visible, by way of the assumption that communicatively structured domains of life are being subordinated to the imperatives of autonomous, formally organized systems of action. Thus the theory of communicative action is intended to make possible a conceptualization of the social-life context that is tailored to the paradoxes of modernity.”

<sup>114</sup> William James, trans. Jacques Barzun, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature: Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 136.

Traditional forms of religious hierarchy are seen as inimical to spirituality, yet as we can readily admit, lost spiritual capital in the form of charismatic leadership is denoted in the narrative above, and points instead to the perceived legitimacy of “other faiths, other spirituality.”

Addressing the recent cultural distaste for Christian forms of legitimacy, Ulrich Beck contends that the inherent universalism of all forms of Christianity is to blame for the exclusivism of its truth claims. These have thus historically culminated in a secularizing process that has still resulted in a dualistic consciousness of which it has proven impossible to dispose.<sup>115</sup> Habermas, of course, has something radically different to offer religious thinkers than does Beck. Habermas conditions language use in such a way as to propose meaningful exchange between different truth claims.<sup>116</sup> However, the optimism in Habermas' near utopian approach to discourse ethics does account for a reflexivity on the part of social theory hardly seen elsewhere. Religion must be tolerated, and the fact that neo-spiritualities have not fully replaced the formerly central role of religion in society, but are wholly present, dictates that a post-secular ethic be applied when considering the various truth claims up for scrutiny.

## 2.3 Specific Themes and Ideal Types

The data analysis suggests, on one level, that for the “inclusive seeker” spirituality is a clear form of consumerism, centered on the fragmented individual – no matter how much discourse is also dedicated to desire for ‘communitas.’ Comparing this with what is being said in connection with the spiritual practices in the U.K., it is noteworthy that Paul Heelas writes of a public turn to an inner idea of the sacred, and not a transcendent God of theism.<sup>117</sup> PJCES, then, is an attempt to survive in this climate of individual vs. communal spirituality. This stage of analysis qualifies this notion further.

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<sup>115</sup> Beck, *A God of One's Own*, 55.

<sup>116</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action vol. II*, 1-2.

<sup>117</sup> Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism. Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 1-2.

The table below aims to demonstrate the similarities and differences in the narratives of the participants in order to make clearer how autonomous religion is expressed in PJCES. Values in this table according to themes are given in increments of ‘LOW, MED(ium), HIGH,’ or simply a ‘-’ to denote nothing relatable, in order to show to what degree these themes were demonstrated and communicated in the interviews. This is not the sort of coding known as “*in vivo*,” which strives to only use the words found verbatim in narrative interviews.<sup>118</sup> Yet my approach also does include exact references to autonomy that the interlocutors produced in narrative. However, and in a more general sense, I instead represent a secondary stage analysis below, which delves deeper into each individual’s positions. This is in order to confirm, disclose, and measure the presence of the types suggested during the initial stages of coding. I have not delved into any apparent gender narrative distinctions, due to the fact that my sample size is not large enough to establish any sort of these correlatives. This is not to say that any correlations do not exist – they very likely do – and the goal here is neither ‘gender blindness’ nor an explicit gender focus as a theoretical or methodological approach (hence fictitious names are used for the participants which reflect their gender). While a great emphasis has been placed by some scholars on the spiritual “holistic milieu for women,”<sup>119</sup> this idea has not been taken up here.

From the first round of coding, the themes that demonstrated difference were further searched for more particular differentiation as depicted below:

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<sup>118</sup> Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 48.

<sup>119</sup> Kieren Flanagan, *A Sociology of Spirituality*, 14.



**Table 2: Second Stage Coding/Theming of Data**

PARTICIPANT:	Ethel	Theodosia	Nestor	Jessica	Eusibia	Thecla	Veronica	Emma	Paul	Robert
TYPE:	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS/SPA	SPA	SPA	SPA
↓ ‘desired’ themes										
Spirituality	HIGH	MED	HIGH	HIGH	MED	MED	HIGH	HIGH	LOW	LOW
Religion	MED	MED	LOW	LOW	MED	MED	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW
Institution	MED	MED	LOW	LOW	MED	LOW	MED	LOW	LOW	LOW
Polity	HIGH	LOW	—	LOW	MED	MED	MED	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
Power	LOW	LOW	—	LOW	MED	LOW	LOW	MED	—	HIGH
Autonomy	HIGH	MED	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
Individuality	HIGH	MED	MED	HIGH	HIGH	MED	HIGH	HIGH	MED	MED
Community	MED	HIGH	LOW	MED	HIGH	MED	HIGH	HIGH	LOW	LOW

I will now attempt to explain what these variations and patterns represent, and what actual meaning could be attached to the prevalence of the types I have begun to construct in the prior section (2.3) and have finally theorized typologically in the following section (2.4).

### 2.3.1 Differentiation of the ‘IS’

Firstly, for those classified as IS, expressed narratives exhibited similar variation of levels of expressed desire for ‘spirituality’ (med-high), as with ‘religion’ and ‘institution’ (low-med). Levels of desired ‘power’ and ‘polity’ are similar in that they are mostly med-low, or even unexpressed. Autonomy, individuality, and community were similarly almost entirely spread med-high. One of the women in the study who can be identified by the IS type stated these interests, which she considers as falling broadly under her practices:

*So there's the classical mythological deities that I'm still strongly attracted to. Celtic deities, Norse deities, Greek deities, but also deities from other religions you know, like, there's Buddhist – I don't have the terminology to talk Buddhist – but essentially different avatars and different Hindu deities who actually do still have modern adherents.*

While this participant in some ways aims to draw a wide circle in terms of inclusiveness, it is expressed as arising out of her self-described protests against the cloistered nature of many mainline Christian denominations. The general significance of these qualifications is that the IS type expresses desire for spirituality, while at the same time a distaste or even 'anti-religious' sentiment towards religions, or indeed, social institutions in general. This is not novel or surprising and is generally understood by most scholars who have commented in the wider SBNR phenomenon. The desire for autonomy and individuality is generally shared with the SPA type. What is strikingly different, and the greatest designator in this attempt at a typological explanation of these narratives, is that the expressed desire for polity and power is markedly different between the IS type, who are mostly not interested, and in some cases ambivalent to, these expressed aims. The ideal SPA type, by contrast, indicate in their narratives a distinctly greater interest and desire for societal power and the ability to exert their own polity within the current political climate in Canada.

One of the other women to fall under this IS type explained her own position on spirituality:

*It is just from an exploration of things, so I might hear about some type of faith, or I might be involved in doing an activity, so when I first started with Buddhism, I was doing some minor meditation in therapy and sort of started exploring Buddhism from there. And the meaning of meditation – taking that to a deeper level, as well as living in the present moment, being in the here and now.*

Inclusivity as a desirable trait is something clearly expressed above. But the idea of *plurality* of belief is in fact starkly absent. While most of the interlocutors expressed desire for toleration of religion and especially other kinds of spiritual practices, there is no marked desire to embrace all practices as equal, or as mutually beneficial.

### 2.3.2 Differentiation of the One Dual Type

It is noteworthy, after all things considered, that one participant (known as ‘Veronica,’ and represented in Figure 1) must be considered an outlier, in that her narrative – rather than being ambiguous – seems at best to display a sort of ‘medium tension’ in between the IS and SPA types. While it could easily be argued that this particular narrative could fit either way, her narrative especially qualifies her ideal type not as either, but as both. The coding yielded an overall balanced rendering of all themes discovered in the first round of coding. She made a few points in her narrative that qualify this place of both types in the typology:

*I believe in powers that cannot be identified, I believe in the power of faith, I believe in the power of believing in something whatever that is: energy from the Sun or the power of believing in a higher power and connections between people and all of those: the things, the un-tangibles.*

This particular person’s *overall* narrative is worth close evaluation because it seems to conform to the IS typology with regard to ‘spirituality’, and in ‘religion’ and ‘institution’ (as indeed, all SPAs did in this case). However, she appears to differentiate between activism and personal spiritual practice which positions her narrative well alongside both the IS and SPA type in the study in regards to ‘polity’, while she also seems to converge with the IS type in terms of desire for ‘power’. Autonomy is, of course, the theme of prevalence, as has been mentioned, among all interviewees. There is no need to draw particular attention to this trait *per se* in this outlier narrative (representing both IS/SPA). Individuality is another common theme that her narrative represented with a high level of expressed desire, which is not a particularly significant designator here either, yet at the same time, she appears higher in desire for community. It is not for lack of information or effort in producing narrative that she appears different from the others in both categories. Given the quality of statements being often in line with those of both sides of the typology, she positively belongs in the matrix, amid the tensions between the idealized types.

### 2.3.3 Differentiation of the ‘SPA’

The emergence of this type, which in my interpretation is the single most significant finding derived from the study, shows a prevalence towards expressions of desired personal polity and ‘real’ power and authority in narrative expressions. One overall marked difference and two slight differences account for this more politically interested spiritual adherent, which are indicated directly below. First, I quote one of the men identified as SPA, who had this to say about religion vs. spirituality:

*I guess to me because the word religious connotes superstition, organized superstition, to be more precise, it also connotes, deism, and I don't sort of believe in divinity, or transcendent agent, or cognizant. Yeah, I would say I am an atheist.*

Yet later in the same narrative the same participant describes, in detail, having experiences self-described as spiritual, which were important and fondly remembered. Overall for SPAs, expressed desire for ‘spirituality’ is less uniform and on average lower (low or high only in this category) than it is for IS, while desire for ‘religion’, or institutional religion in general is almost entirely low, displaying more uniformity than the IS type (though likewise being mostly low-med as expressed desire). The SPA’s notions around ‘polity’ and ‘power’, however, are the source of the greatest differentiation between the IS and SPA. ‘Polity’ itself expressed as a desire more prominently in the narratives of the SPAs, while ideas of power are *not unified at all* between the four potential SPAs. The emphasis placed on ‘autonomy’ and ‘individuality’ are nearly the same as the IS, where the stratification of community demonstrates the same variation in the case of the SPA as it did with regard to spirituality.

One of the women in this study under the SPA category stated these things about the potential for spiritual collective action:

*People are constantly trying to [...] cheat on capitalism. But for there to be kind of a collective movement, something like ... there's the political side: so we see the occupy Wall Street happened and occupy London happened and you know different things like that where a lot of people were like "Ok we're fed up." So I think it would take there being a few strong voices, people being organized, to be able to do something like that.*

Her claims of desired autonomy from economic constraints are present in the excerpt above, and while she does later mention “pluralism,” she does not express a desire to embody something pluralistic *herself*. I suggest below what these claims across the SPA type mean, and then, further down (in section 2.5), suggest how these types can form a typology of non-institutional spiritual people juxtaposed with traditional conceptions of institutional religious people. Moving forward, the SPA type, though smaller in terms of proportion of the overall sample, will prove to be much more engaging as a sociological and theological concept than the IS, which itself mainly forms a background from which a meaningful depiction of the SPA type can emerge from the narratives.

In all of the cases in which a participant has been assigned the SPA label, expressed desire for spirituality is understood to be correlative to political action. This connection in my interpretation is conceived of as *religious belief that is dependent upon practice*. The SPA type really hinges on the concept of lived spirituality informing and *demanding* action on the part of the individual. One man under the SPA type made the claim that non-institutional spirituality as a form of polity is essentially less oppressive than institutional religion:

*I was baptized Catholic, but there is lots of Catholicism I totally disagree with that I wouldn't want to identify [with] as a Catholic. So if we're to merge politics and spirituality in a way that is not oppressive, it would have to in a very accepting, open, loving way, but I think that is key to our liberation.*

Indeed, the theme of spirituality providing liberation also came up in the discourse of the other post-Roman Catholic narrative in the SPA category – the same young woman quoted above who identified with indigenous spirituality:

*It's been very different for me going to a Catholic church in San Salvador El Salvador where Oscar Romero held mass in the basement and it was like the source of people's faith to hold together during like an extremely hard and traumatic time, and going to church in kind of a middle-class really privileged mostly white community where there's just a different relationship to the same God.*

It would seem that given the statements above (and others not cited here from the rest of the sample) that among those identified as SPA the ideal of spirituality becomes *incorruptible subjective autonomy*, while institutional religion is dealt with as a

corrupting influence on the purity of the subjective self. That is not to say that these interlocutors always completely dismayed of religious involvement, but they see it as something that is potentially dangerous, to the extent that any benefits would be eclipsed by the inevitable pitfalls. The exception to this is the notion of ‘*communitas*,’ which is likewise embraced and expressed as a desire in the narratives, and requires religious adherence to the value of community *contra* feelings of autonomous spirituality. Theologically, I find this to be an interesting paradox indeed, and well worth theological reflection on the concept of the Spirit outside of the ecclesia.

## 2.4 The Sociological and Practical-Theological Meaning of Autonomy

For now, it will suffice to say that SPA narratives *generally* suggest more uniformity in their expressed desires on some issues (religion, institution, polity) than the IS type, while at the same time an equal amount of uniformity in desire for others (autonomy, individuality) as the IS. Furthermore, the SPAs also demonstrate a greater stratification of difference for some issues (spirituality itself, power, community) than do their IS peers in this study. This section aims to explore what the significance of the autonomy theme is to the project of this thesis. Clearly, within the limits of this thesis I cannot examine all of the themes identified. I will, however, claim that the autonomy theme can be most adequately summarized as a contemporary form of non-institutional spirituality which is embraced in the sorts of values and practices denoted above.

One of the participants in the study had this to say about the idea of freedom in contemporary spirituality:

*I think all of society in going in this direction: that it's not so black and white anymore. People hate the concept of having to put themselves into one box, but I think that's not just with faith, it's with everything: it's with their careers, activities, the sense of who they are, everything. I think people want options, people want freedom to choose.*

The modern notion of autonomy, as it is understood today, is often a matter of self-determination, which involves not only making choices, but of knowing one's own limits,

and thus acting within them.<sup>120</sup> Humans often desire to be more than mere biological organisms, trapped by the limitations of the physical senses. Thus, metaphysical and theological claims are regularly made by spiritual people, with little regard to the logical reduction of them to materialist ends undertaken in many quarters of the academy. One of the interlocutors had this to say about her feelings of empowerment through spirituality:

*I think of the power of humanity: the power and the changes that one person can make in the world, and that I am connected to that in some way. Yes I feel much more powerful. I feel like there's hope for good things in the world whether that one person who is inspiring me again is a religious figure or someone who just does good in the world. It's funny because the one time that I felt powerful and empowered I was on a protest trip to Toronto.*

She expresses how she is free to feel power in the merging of spirituality and a global perspective towards activism and change. This tendency to connect one's own power with the power to change the world for the better seems to suggest a post-Christian and post-Enlightenment ethos that pervades the thought of many in the search for altruistic meaning.

There is, I shall argue, scope for Christian theology to engage more constructively with such people than it tends to do, even if it needs to be aware of the potential limitations of such an approach. Post-enlightenment ethical liberal thought cannot be the final and eschatological hope of theology, as per Barth's opposition to the dominant liberal ideology in theology during his day.<sup>121</sup> Barth understood this notion of the autonomy of the church from his teacher at Marburg, Wilhelm Herrman, whose important work on this subject influenced how Barth later desired to accomplish more than ethical moralism, or the absolute dependence of liberal theology.<sup>122</sup> Barth, then, was for his part acutely aware of the inability of the church to work within the frameworks of modernity.

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<sup>120</sup> Claire Rasmussen. *The Autonomous Animal: Self-Governance and the Modern Subject*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), x.

<sup>121</sup> John B. Webster, *Barth*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>122</sup> Albert A. Jagnow, "Karl Barth and Wilhelm Herrmann: Pupil and Teacher," *The Journal of Religion* 16, no. 3 (Jul., 1936), 302-303.

Closer to our current context, on a broader scale, sociologists and philosophers like Slavoj Žižek claim, as we read above, that phenomena such as western Buddhism are a form of commodity fetishism which mediate a false consciousness to the consumer: one that places the consumer as somehow existing outside of global capitalism.<sup>123</sup> In doing so Žižek refers to Hegel's reflexive determinism whereby power is as a hypnotizing authority that can be reasoned away, and to Pascal who said that the king only appears as a king because of perception.<sup>124</sup> Ultimately, without these perceived norms, there is no basis for the dominant social order. If social norms are to exist at all, they require some ideological basis. Therefore, the old legitimacy deriving from institutions has been replaced by a new authority, which is that of the individual who chooses spirituality. This then grounds a necessary altruism, and a new set of moral imperatives. But whether such a culture can be reconciled with Christian theology is a difficult question. As Barth indicated in the excerpts above, the idea of ethical autonomy can scarcely form the basis of either genuine religious life or a genuine theology.

In connection with this theme of individualism, Bourdieu did not frequently address religion head-on, but in general he famously suggested that: “*habitus*, an old Aristotelian and Thomist concept that I completely rethought, can be understood as a way of escaping the choice between a structuralism without a subject and the philosophy of the subject.”<sup>125</sup> As such, Bourdieu questions *all* assumed legitimacy assigned to any power structure. Free will is hardly a factor in recognizing and admonishing religion, since the awareness of authority is inherited and handed on to all of us in a variety of ways, making it impossible to differentiate between intersubjective truth-claims concerning the legitimacy of the *status quo*. In this reality, it becomes impossible to differentiate between the legitimacy of the social circumstances that surround us on a

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<sup>123</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006; 2001), 170.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>125</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Oxford: Polity, 1990), 10.



daily basis and the providence of God in human life.<sup>126</sup> The effect is that most, if not all, of the human race cannot arrive at the concept that autonomy can only be understood as knowing one's limitations and exerting one's own will within them.

After the sixteenth century, in Germany, autonomy was a term “employed in the context of the religious conflicts and signified a certain freedom of religion recognized in the political and juridical sphere.”<sup>127</sup> The theme of autonomy was in this European sense a religious one, coming out of late antiquity, experienced to a degree in Medieval feudalism, yet found lacking from the absolute monarchies and centralized nation states of the early modern period as described by Barth scholar John Macken.<sup>128</sup> We can well imagine the bi-polar nature of this notion of autonomy of belief standing in opposition to an imperialistic form of Christianity. Taking on this idea in modern times, the theologian Nicholas Lash has commented on the quality of individualized religion (e.g., he refers to astrology and yoga, spirituality and mysticism, parapsychology and science fiction, cults and quackery<sup>129</sup>) within secularized society as representing a:

[...] dissociation between disaffected public order – the territory of what counts as ‘rational’ behavior – and anarchic private fantasy has seldom, if ever, been so thorough or, perhaps, so dangerous.<sup>130</sup>

A similar idea of post 1960's “dissociation” is also taken up by theologian David Fergusson,<sup>131</sup> as mentioned in Chapter 1. This distance between the general populous and the church has created space for new spiritual capital, an aspect missing from purely material enterprises, and can be harnessed for a variety of ‘restorative benefits’ within

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<sup>126</sup> Terry Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* (London; Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub., 2007), 1.

<sup>127</sup> Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics*, 1.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16-17.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>131</sup> David Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2-5.

capitalism itself.<sup>132</sup> It is bought, sold and acquired in similar ways as religious capital, but is more widely available to non-institutional practitioners.<sup>133</sup>

Why then, as has been argued, are the new forms of spirituality making us now even more unsatisfied with our autonomy than we were, in ages past, as a society under a dominant and institutionally Christian hegemony?<sup>134</sup> Christianity has become, for many, unpalatable spiritually and intellectually, yet those seeking elsewhere seem even more unsatisfied with the lack of traditional community. The understanding of institutional religion in North America has thus largely been known, historically, along the lines of Protestant denominationalism,<sup>135</sup> which in-itself is a history of fragmentation. However, religion itself, understood from the ‘classic’ sociological theorists, has long ago ceased to form a rational alternative to the secular objections to religious hegemony. David Fergusson comments on the quality of religious observance in contemporary Western society, alerting us to the reality that:

Institutions and organizations which commanded the commitment of mass memberships are generally in decline. Our corporate life is increasingly fractured and fragmented. [...] The pressures towards the atomization of social life can be detected in shifting patterns of family life with more people living alone than ever before, in working practices which place us increasingly in front of computers, in leisure pursuits which are more various and accommodating of individual preferences, in meal times and moments of relaxation spent not in conversation but in front of a television screen.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Danah Zohar and I. N. Marshall, *Spiritual Capital: Wealth we can Live By*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2004); cf. William O'Brien in Michael O'Sullivan and Bernadette Flanagan. *Spiritual Capital: Spirituality in Practice in Christian Perspective*. (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 97-108.

<sup>133</sup> Bradford Verter, “Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu,” *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 2 (2003), 157-158.

<sup>134</sup> This is essentially the point in the recent, and rather scathing critique of contemporary ‘holistic’ spirituality in David Webster, *Dispirited: How Contemporary Spirituality Makes Us Stupid Selfish and Unhappy* (Alresford, UK: Zero Books, 2012), passim.

<sup>135</sup> Philip Goff, *The Blackwell Companion to Religion in America* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 3-11.

<sup>136</sup> Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, 3.

He goes on to explain that the totalizing effects of modernity on the ecclesia seem central, and points to the fact that neither total assimilation nor total rejection of the modern secular place of faith is actually possible, or can even be modelled, practically-speaking.<sup>137</sup>

The sociologist Bryan Wilson, commenting in the mid-twentieth century, already noticed the sharp decline in institutional authority, especially that of the clerical leadership.<sup>138</sup> Through secularization, the churches had long ago lost their cultivated position as an authority on a variety of matters, with the public slowly but consistently showing a marked shift towards professionalized scientific views. Thus, secularization can well be understood – indeed, as it has been already in history – as theoretically linked to the formation of the modern liberally endowed and enlightened ‘autonomous self.’ In this vein, Claire Rasmussen argues that:

In broad terms, the identification of political subjectivity with autonomy or the assumption that those capable of self-governance should be permitted to engage in self-governance produces a number of effects.<sup>139</sup>

This understanding of autonomy alongside of secularization has to be taken seriously for any real understanding of spirituality to emerge. Perhaps there is not so much realization of autonomy actually connected with this practice than is referenced in the speech of the participants, regardless of their overall religious or spiritual consciousness. The paradox of autonomy is alive and well here. On the paradoxical idea of autonomy as real freedom, Thomas Merton wrote:

Freedom for what? [...] It is understood that the freedom we seek is a freedom which is purchased at the price of renouncing another type of freedom. The freedom that we are talking about in the contemplative life and in the monastic life is the freedom which is bought by the renunciation of license or the simple capacity to follow any legitimate desire in any legitimate direction. Besides renouncing illegitimate freedom we also give up a certain lawful autonomy.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>138</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: Watts, 1966), 74.

<sup>139</sup> Rasmussen, *The Autonomous Animal*, 169.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971). 360.

Merton is essentially speaking in relation to the situation in the U.S.A., but this situation is not unique in the West. One cannot be autonomous without recognition of penultimate authority of some kind, and one could even suggest that secular processes have helped to create this desire for autonomy in an implicitly religious way. Robert D. Putnam's famous work in *Bowling Alone* is a widely cited and much debated text on the decline of social capital in the United States of America in general post-1960. Putnam was critical, like many sociologists of his generation, of fully embracing the previously held notions regarding the absoluteness of the secularization thesis.<sup>141</sup> Following this, Putnam subsequently shared further research into social capital in *Better Together*, which has as its aim the rediscovery of community vitality in American culture. The post-1960s themes identified in *Bowling Alone* are used to demonstrate, through case studies, the partial or even complete reversal of the effects of the secularization and dissociation of social capital in a Western society like the United States.<sup>142</sup> I would suggest that this pursuit is as much a theological as it is a sociological one.

The question of individualism and community is far from straightforward, however, even in religious life. Often, as with Merton, Christian saints and leaders have sought spirituality in isolation. When one takes into account the *Conferences* of John Cassian and his companion Germanus in the Egyptian desert during the fourth century CE,<sup>143</sup> it can become difficult to bridge the ancient traditions of ascetic spirituality with modern desires for individualism, which stand in tension with what is possibly the most (digitally) connected society ever. Thomas Merton has described how Christian ascetics

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<sup>141</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 69. Here Putnam attempts to avoid the pitfalls of the generic 'secularization debates/theses', especially with regard to the relationship between social capital and religion, and religion's ultimate and seemingly imminent demise in the West.

<sup>142</sup> Robert D. Putnam, Lewis M. Feldstein and Don Cohen, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004; 2003), 119-135.

<sup>143</sup> See Claire E. Wolfeich's discussion of spirituality in the practical theological perspective in Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 329-331. She makes an appeal for others to address personal fragmentation in theological perspective.

in bygone ages were able to live alone in the desert (e.g., Saint Anthony) in a life of hermitical contemplation.<sup>144</sup> However, it was communal life that emerged as the dominant form of monastic experience in the Christian tradition. Among the Trappist community to which Merton belonged, ascetics themselves formed living ‘religious families’ – a society distinct from the secular.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, Christian mysticism in practice has been the site of some constructive, albeit contextual, theologies of community.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, the paradox of autonomy has forced Christians (and post-Christians) to seek ways to extend the Christian commitment from autonomy to community, or extend this commitment to secular forms of life (as with PJCES).

The paradoxical stance on autonomy in the paragraphs directly above is certainly bound up with the legacy of Immanuel Kant, and consideration for Kantian philosophy was also extremely important to Karl Barth with the ideal of: “the autonomy of the life of faith.”<sup>147</sup> This was important to Barth’s rejection of the liberalizing processes embedded in much modern Protestant theology. Barth scholar John Webster records that the idea of autonomy in faith was “absorbed” by Barth from his influential teacher at Marburg, Wilhelm Herrmann.<sup>148</sup> A reaction against this sort of intellectualized autonomous faith in ethics caused Barth – especially in protest to “Ernst Troeltsch’s subsuming of Christianity under the history of moral culture” – to deny the theological environment into which he initially strode willingly.<sup>149</sup> Barth instead stated that “God in his own freedom bestows human freedom.”<sup>150</sup> This Barthian theological claim will be essential to keep in mind

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<sup>144</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert: Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century* (New York: New Directions, 1961; 1960), 6-8.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>146</sup> Christian Duquoc and Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Mysticism and the Institutional Crisis*, Vol. 1994/4 (London: SCM Press, 1994), 82.

<sup>147</sup> Webster, *Barth*, 4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

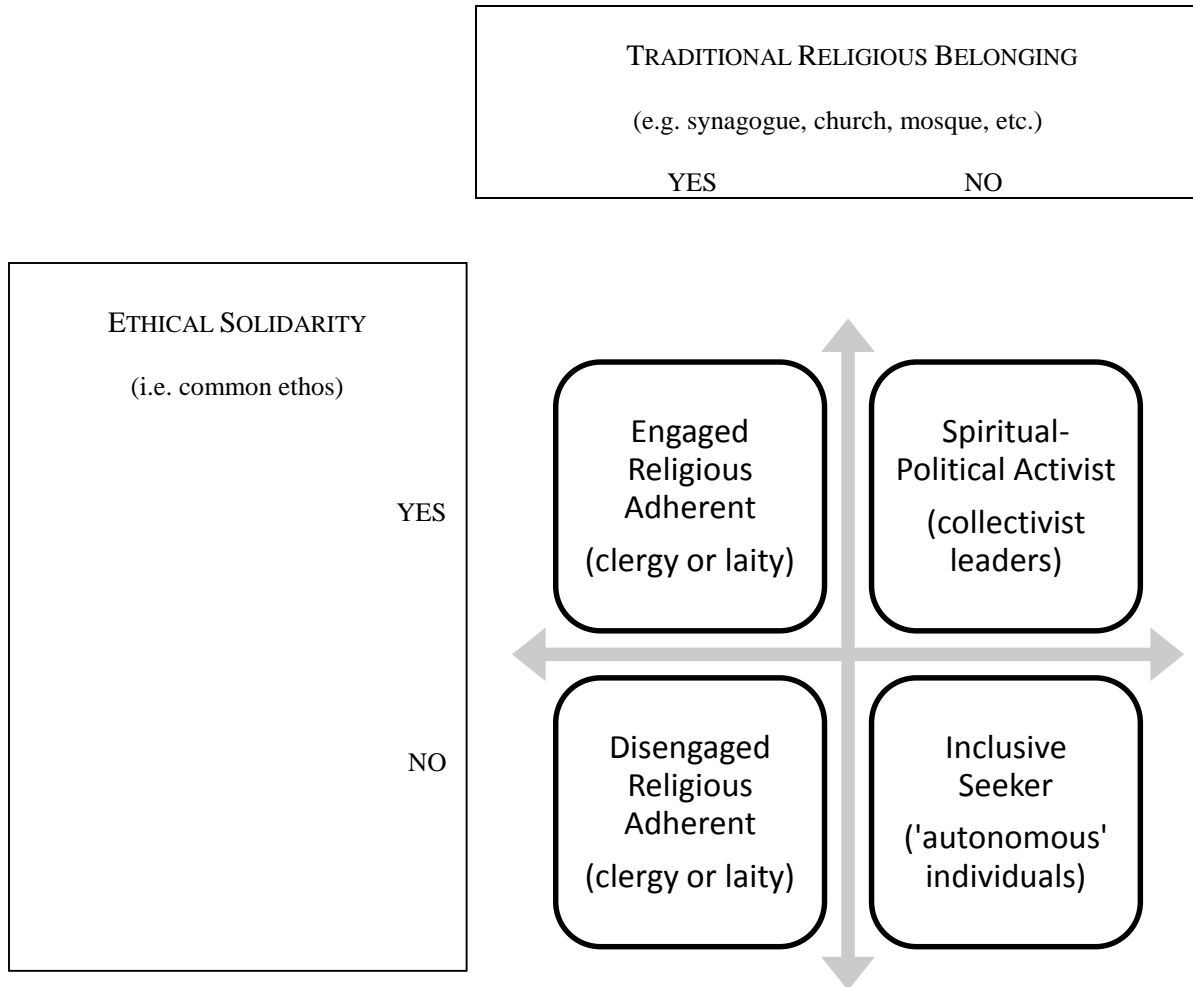
<sup>150</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996; 1960), 75.

when moving on into the pneumatological argument in Chapter Three. But first, I will finally represent the typology developed for this thesis in full.

## 2.5 A Grounded-Theoretical Typology Emerging from Interview Data Analysis

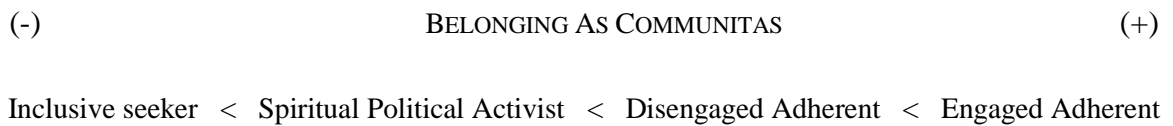
This graphical typology, rather than representing a strict and/or ‘closed-course’ Cartesian categorical system, is merely an attempt to merge both theoretical aims with the practical outcomes of my research. The types exemplified on the left side of the y axis are purely ideal (“Engaged Religious Adherent”; “Disengaged Religious Adherent”), conceived of for working in juxtaposition with the equally-ideal types on the right side for which I demonstrated measureable and interpreted evidence above (in the form of the analysis of the interviewee’s narratives) as rationale for suggesting this typology in the first place. This thesis has, so far, used the language of ‘institutional’ vs. ‘non-institutional’ not as a divisive categorization, but as a qualification of differentiation for the purpose of actually suggesting a *binding* relationship between all parties. As one can see below, the x axis demonstrates evidence of narrative confirming or denying institutional belonging, which both of my suggested types (SPA, and IS; on the right) negate directly within the context of the interviews. The upper y axis merely demonstrates a higher degree of cohesion into a unified ethos of solidarity, while the lower demonstrates fragmented individuals and a lower degree of cohesion in terms of any unifying spiritual or material ethos:

**Figure 2: Grounded Theoretical Typology of Institutional vs. Non-Institutional (SBNR) Religion**



The types above, again, are not binding, and are purely for the purpose of defining the landscape of the narratives *provided and advocated by the participants themselves*. Put into a spectrum, along an *x* axis of overall sense of belonging, the typology can also be conceived even more simply as follows:

**Figure 3: Continuum of Belonging**



In regards to this proposed typology, I argue that a process of communicative rationality is possibly the only way by which these typically fragmented spiritual adherents (SPA and IS types) could collectivize into something resembling unification in a post-secular religious sense. Left alone, it seems, as the prevailing secularization theories of the West and the discourse of secular humanism announce (and to some extent, the arguments of the new atheists too<sup>151</sup>), fragmented spiritual adherents like those represented in my study can never amount to a collective identity. Yet this reality is not finality. Clearly, this proposed unification would require a sea-change in how autonomous individuals view themselves, and in how established institutions (i.e., churches, governments, etc) view those who exist in tension with the status quo of both traditional religion and the prevailing secular mindset under late capitalism. The difficulties in understanding this change, however, do not infringe upon the reality of whether or not these phenomena are already occurring. Indeed, I suggest above that the presence of PJCES evidences the fact that this change is already developing in a post-secular environment.

Again, the defining piece of this social puzzle, and the first theme I claimed of import to this thesis, is that of the modern notion of autonomy. The theologian Walter Kasper traced this concept back to Descartes' famous idea of the *ego cogitans*: "a subject who grasps himself as a subject."<sup>152</sup> This idea, it has been argued, began a new form of reasoning not yet seen before in human society, and in which "The idea of God is admitted as the ground of means of human autonomy." This is because prior to Descartes' developments towards the seemingly inevitable Kantian "Copernican revolution" in enlightenment philosophy (and theology), humans did not think of themselves as autonomous, i.e. they did not view themselves as subjects separate from God – theologically. This view does not malign the legacy of Descartes on Western consciousness, but it does show us where autonomy as a concept began: with the idea of God's own divine, perfect, and ultimately ideal autonomy. Kasper also argues that:

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<sup>151</sup> Richard P. Cimino, Christopher Smith and Martin E. Marty, *Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2014), 53-54.

<sup>152</sup> Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 18.



The emancipation of law and morality from the theological contests that had given them their foundations meant a new situation for religion. If religion is no longer the necessary presupposition of order, law and morals in society, then it inevitably becomes a private affair.<sup>153</sup>

The difference between the time Kasper speaks of above and more recent times is that, as Habermas has alerted us, we can now forge ahead into post-secular frames of understanding, which were not possible before. This means that methodological atheism is not the issue at hand for the post-secular theologian. The issue at hand, again stemming from Habermas, is that religion can *re-enter* the public sphere due to the spiritual backlash against the nihilism present with the commodification of life-worlds. Secularism and atheism are not legitimate challenges to religion in the post-secular conception, since all truth claims are valid for verification. Instead, the real challenge is secular and ideological *ignorance* of the reality of the resurgence of religious meaning in forms like PJCES. This also means that autonomy must also be conceived of differently than before, both in a spiritual and a material sense.

If then, as we have briefly seen above, secularism has indeed halted in the West – or, at least, become more complicated and less direct in its effects – we can begin to understand Habermas’ conception of the post-secular as expressing the reality that “[...] modern societies not only have to gear themselves to the continued existence of religion, but that religions actively shape social life at different levels and in a variety of forms.”<sup>154</sup> Secularism presupposes that we are, in the West, at best better off without institutional religion, and that at worst we will merely continue on tolerating religion with the apparent knowledge that its metaphysical claims amount to futility.

This impasse is nothing new, as Claudia M. Schmidt, commenting on Hume and Kant’s theories of religion, states that:

[...] Hume seems to indicate [...] the human species would be better off without religion, although any organized attempt [a secular ethic?] to eradicate any or all of the existing

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>154</sup> Micheal Reder in Habermas, *An Awareness of what is Missing*, 36.

religions from human life would probably provoke conflicts at least as destructive of human happiness and social order as the conflicts between religions.<sup>155</sup>

In the enlightenment era religion actually experienced a widespread reinvention, however, the liberalizing influences of those like Schleiermacher have run their logical course in full. None of the post-enlightenment options described above are particularly palatable or practical from the perspective of the current institutional church(es), or SBNR adherents. Indeed, none of the ethical or altruistic religious explanations really describe what is going on within the phenomena of PJCES either. However, the difference today between ancient Hebraic and Near Eastern, Greco-Roman classical, medieval, enlightenment, and even early modern concepts of religious impulse, is that religious tendency itself is something commodified through the endless cycle of ‘church-sect’ processes<sup>156</sup> in addition to the late reign of global capitalism. This reality shows us why the potential for post-secular religious belonging is a *new* thing.

The post-secular is potentially the only conceivable way to answer what Ulrich Beck has already called contemporary “religion’s capacity for peace and potential for violence,” as we can see here from Beck’s summary of Habermas’ imperative:

What Habermas calls for as a way of regulating conflicts arising from the absolute, mutually exclusive claims of religious truths is nothing less than a civility that transcends entrenched religious differences. All creeds must accept and indeed positively affirm a religious and intellectual pluralism, and not just as the lesser evil. It follows that it is wrong to deny ‘rationality’ to religious voices in the public sphere from the outset. [...] Behind this we can glimpse the concept [...] of the ‘*post-secular society*’.<sup>157</sup>

Thus, as Beck rightly points out in the above excerpt, Habermas is thought to be one of the first major theorists to take the concept of the post-secular with any amount of seriousness.<sup>158</sup> Habermas, in preparing the ground for practical application of theory, at

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<sup>155</sup> Claudia M. Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 375-76.

<sup>156</sup> Hans-Georg Drescher, *Ernst Troeltsch: His Life and Work* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993), 222-242.

<sup>157</sup> Beck, *A God of One’s Own*, 155.

<sup>158</sup> Micheal Leezenberg in Molendjik, *Exploring the Post-Secular*, 92.

the same time problematizes and aids the practical theological mind. Firstly, he does a disservice because he demonstrates a rational account of ethical stability in discourse outside of any imperative for divinely sanctioned and ordered existence.<sup>159</sup> However, he secondarily provides a potential handle for the theologian's task to grasp at and indeed grapple with: that a forum for truth claims could form the basis for the rational centrality of secular ethics rooted in an appeal to the ethics already available to the religious adherent. Though, for Habermas, religious ethics are merely a means to an end – the end being the penultimate primacy of the secular ethics of the public sphere – while the post-secular is a purely an historical and social situation:

A 'post-secular' society must at some point have been in a 'secular' state. The controversial term can therefore only be applied to the affluent societies of Europe or countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where people's religious ties have steadily or rather quite dramatically lapsed in the post-World War II period.<sup>160</sup>

Habermas' theoretical positioning of the post-secular is extremely significant to the contemporary understanding of the commodification of religion; or alternatively the religion of commodification found in contemporary spirituality.<sup>161</sup> In a similar sense, Žižek has written of the predicament that every Westerner now finds themselves in:

[...] everybody is free as an individual, but merely a cog in a machine when part of a crowd. Nowhere is the legacy of religion clearer: this, exactly, is the paradox of Predestination, of the unfathomable mechanism of Grace embodied, among other places, in market success.<sup>162</sup>

No spiritual movement can escape the grasp of the market's influence on decision making, and so called options of 'choice.' This reality, in turn, classifies wide-swaths of people as "Consumtariat," which Žižek describes as:

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<sup>159</sup> An alternate ethic was proposed in Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>160</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society." *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 2008, 25 (4): 17-29.

<sup>161</sup> David Webster critiques the SBNR phenomena as a depoliticising force in contemporary society through its consumerist appeal, as in his work *Dispirited*, 14.

<sup>162</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*. (London; New York: Verso, 2011), 236. Žižek, in this recent work, mentions that he is borrowing the concept of the Consumtariat from Bard and Söderqvist's *Netocracy* (already cited above).

[...] the idea that, in developed societies, the lower class is no longer a proletariat but a class of consumers kept satisfied with cheap, mass-produced commodities, from genetically modified foods to digitalized mass culture.

Žižek goes on to say that he sees the Consumtariat as becoming:

[...] a reality with basic income: those included from the production process are paid the basic income not only for reasons of solidarity, but also so that their demand will fuel production and thus prevent crises.<sup>163</sup>

This situation allows for the leeching of spirituality into commodified forms which segue into the colonization of the spiritual lifeworld, alongside the same processes besetting the economic, social, political, personal worlds implicated in the struggle for autonomy under globalization and the lack of freedom implicit in the truth claims of free-market democracy. The post-secular concept, however, changes this colonized reality.

Bryan S. Turner has written that religion in post-secular society survives as “an alternative to the simple notion of secularization as membership decline and social irrelevance.”<sup>164</sup> This is a highly critical statement for theologians: it denotes that religion will survive, yet in abbreviated forms unlike that found in prior historical epochs. Turner goes on to claim that:

Religion survives in Immanuel Kant’s terms not so much as a reflective faith but more as health and wealth cults offering a range of services to a variety of this-worldly needs of human beings. Religion is perfectly compatible with secular consumerism as we can observe through the functions of religious markets in providing general spiritual rather than narrowly ecclesiastical services. [...]

In the modern world with the development of the Internet for example the role of these traditional intermediaries [i.e., “prophets, angels, mythical creatures, landscapes, or spirits”] is breaking down and the ineffable hierarchy of beings is being democratized by popular manifestations of religion. The sacred is now effable.<sup>165</sup>

Theologians should begin to acknowledge that almost anyone today can ‘chose’ to perceive themselves as somehow endowed with access to divinity, and as having the

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<sup>163</sup> Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 236.

<sup>164</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 651.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

potential to conceive of themselves as theologically legitimate authorities. Whether a theological critique of this contemporary standpoint is possible or not, it is important for theologians to recognize that no institutional theological source is now regarded as sound or legitimate by many major sections of the population, since the idea of an institutional mediation of religious authority is alien to peoples' heightened sense of individual autonomy. This fact has massive implications for a variety of religious (and other) institutions, including the institutional ecclesia.

While it is obvious that no full-scale response to these matters is possible within the limits of this thesis, some tentative response is obviously needed. The task is now to provide a provisional sketch of how this study of spirituality might be worked out in distinctly *theological* terms, in both a practical and theoretical sense, in the final Chapter.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Towards a Post-Secular Pneumatology

#### 3.1 Twentieth Century Approaches to Pneumatology

In this final Chapter I will first refer to some important twentieth century theologians' approaches to Christian pneumatology, and subsequently place these in connection with a practice of theology. Then, and most importantly, I will conclude that the spirituality studied and termed PJCES above can be particularly well understood from a broadly Christian theological perspective, which leads to a position that is hopeful about the meaning these phenomena hold for a practical and post-secular theology. The theological vignettes which follow are not intended to offer an exhaustive account of pneumatology by any means, but are appropriate and useful because they provide an additional theoretical and ecumenical dimension to the study.

To begin with, I will consider the work of Karl Rahner. This important twentieth century Roman Catholic theologian, widely known for his Trinitarian theology (and especially for the famous accord that “the economic trinity is the immanent trinity,”<sup>166</sup> and *vice versa*), also became recognized for his notion of “anonymous Christians,” which he described in a short essay bearing the same title.<sup>167</sup> Reflecting broadly the theological ideas of Vatican II, he commented that:

[...] somehow all men must be capable of being members of the Church; and this capacity must not be understood merely in the sense of an abstract and purely logical possibility, but as a real and historically concrete one.– But this means in its turn that there must be degrees of membership in the Church, not only in ascending order from being baptised [...] but also in descending order from the explicitness of baptism into non-official and anonymous

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<sup>166</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 22; cf. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 1, where the author takes up this theme anew.

<sup>167</sup> Karl Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” in Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 390-398.

Christianity in a meaningful sense, even though it itself cannot and would not describe itself as such.<sup>168</sup>

Rahner concluded that anonymous Christianity was a valid theological concept providing new insight, based on a pneumatological understanding of the grace of God. This grace opens all of God's creatures to a possible awareness of God's action as spirit *in reality*.<sup>169</sup> He goes on to state that *anyone* who lets themselves be openly "taken hold of" by this God-given grace is an anonymous Christian.<sup>170</sup> Rahner also maintained his idea of "anonymous Christianity" through a range of publications, and in a series of interviews:

For there are many "anonymous Christians" who do not know that, deep down, they are living from God's grace and the power of eternity. Of course, [...] all of this becomes much stronger, clearer, and more certain when I meet Jesus than if I had to rely only on the awareness of my own personal experience.<sup>171</sup>

While the excerpts given directly above obviously cannot convey the full philosophical and theological significance of Rahner's theology, they do provide a practical sense of what his systematic mind had on offer regarding the concept of spirit (Ger. *Geist*), in particular in relation to the possibilities latent in a theological appropriation of the non-institutional activity of the Holy Spirit. Rahner's theology positions within traditional Trinitarian theology the Spirit as God's immanent gift to mankind, rather than as a gift merely mediated externally by the institutional church. This non-absolutism, as we might call it, in Rahnerian ecclesiology, and Rahner's general openness to the importance of an unmediated experience of the Spirit in human life, are clearly relevant to the findings of this study.

Another useful way of looking at Rahner's theology at this point, which also has the effect of de-centering the church in theology, might be to lay emphasis on his view of

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>171</sup> Karl Rahner et al., *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews*, 1965-1982 (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 89. Cf. the anonymous status of God's work John Vernon Taylor, *The Go-between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, 1 American ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 5.

the theological enterprise in general, in which a certain tendency to modesty is in evidence. This is because, as Rahner stated himself, “all theological statements [...] are analogical statements.”<sup>172</sup> In making this case, Rahner was, of course, merely re-stating a classical Catholic theological theme against the triumphal tendencies in (what he regarded as) the decadent Catholicism of the earlier twentieth century. For Rahner, the appeal to analogy specifically means that:

[...] an analogical way of thinking is characterized by the fact that, with the help of such an approach, an assertion about a specific reality is legitimate and unavoidable. However, at the same time, the assertion must always be negative in a certain sense. [...]

[W]e usually forget that any statement about God is legitimate only to the extent that it is always simultaneously negated.<sup>173</sup>

Thus, the work of the Holy Spirit can both be spoken of with confidence, and at the same time be requiring of analogical reserve, which keeps intact God’s final transcendence. Nevertheless, only through reference to transcendence is some form of metaphysical understanding of the created order and of humankind possible. Rahner’s contention is that such understanding is latent in human experience, since God is both its basis and the only conceivable means of its realization. In short, the human ability to transcend the merely immanent concerns of life is the real gift of the Spirit for Rahner. In his theological system, ‘spirit in the world’ is the source for human self-transcendence towards the infinite, thus the Holy Spirit is active among anonymous Christians. David Coffey refers to Rahner’s idea this way:

In all his theology Rahner looks first to the “subject,” the human person, the “anonymous Christian,” who is destined for fulfillment in God and who with the aid of grace finds him in the warp and woof of life.<sup>174</sup>

Nicholas Adams has speculated that future theological efforts will not interact with Rahner directly, but will more likely interpret his work in light of ‘repairs’ made in

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<sup>172</sup> Karl Rahner in Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 298.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 298-299.

<sup>174</sup> David Coffey, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 101.



responses to Rahner, such as those found in George Lindbeck's seminal work *The Nature of Doctrine*.<sup>175</sup> Yet by considering Rahner directly, we can readily see the potential relevance of Rahner's theology to present interests – and discover a transcendentalist approach often explicitly lacking down many other theological avenues of the twentieth century. Rahner made statements such as: “By spirit I mean a power which reaches out beyond the world and knows the metaphysical. [The] World is the name of reality which is accessible to the immediate experience of man.”<sup>176</sup> In Rahner's theology, in short, the Holy Spirit is that power by which transcendence can be known. Alongside this, Rahner wrote of the Holy Spirit that:

The starting point is the experience of faith, which makes us aware that, through what we call “Holy Spirit,” God (hence the Father) *really* communicates *himself* as love and forgiveness, that he produces this self-communication in us and maintains it by himself. Hence the “Spirit” must be God himself.<sup>177</sup>

Yet, Rahner's object of study – analyzing Thomist philosophy in cooperation with Kantian Idealism and modern existentialism – has a larger goal than only pneumatology. Anthony Godzieba comments that Rahner's Trinitarian theology has more in common with Thomist thought itself, than with the popular intellectual movement known in the twentieth century as ‘Neo-Scholasticism,’ “[...] where the study and nature of the one God and the study of the Trinity are seen as different yet complementary moments of encounter with revelation.”<sup>178</sup> In truth, however, the explicitly Trinitarian question that frames Rahner's pneumatology is relatively undeveloped. David Coffey writes of Rahner's Trinitarian theology that:

Only the Father is “unoriginated,” while the Son is “begotten” of the Father, and the Holy Spirit, whose procession is not a begetting, is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Surprisingly, Rahner makes no further reference to the *Filioque*. He considers he is phrasing

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<sup>175</sup> Nicholas Adams, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 211-212

<sup>176</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), liii.

<sup>177</sup> Rahner, *The Trinity*, 67.

<sup>178</sup> Anthony Godzieba in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 138.

this procession “more precisely” by saying that “the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son.”<sup>179</sup>

A full appreciation of this is again beyond the narrow scope of this thesis. Yet if we concern ourselves primarily with Rahner’s conception of the Holy Spirit, we see the outlines, at least, of an intensely practical approach to the question, in which human spirituality both within and beyond the church has a place. For Rahner, the Spirit is *the* central location of God’s action in Christian and indeed all forms of human life. These ideas and more belong to Rahner, and do seem to achieve some measure of coherence, offering something of a way ahead among the many forms of pneumatology in modern times.

Another major version of pneumatology of the twentieth century is that of Karl Barth, who approaches the question from a very different angle than Rahner. One of the standard commentators in Barth’s pneumatology, John Thompson, interprets the first volume of *Kirchliche Dogmatik* to have four main lines of argument concerning the Holy Spirit: a) Equality (i.e. the Spirit is equal to God); b) Revelation (i.e. Spirit is a form of Revelation); c) Eschatology (i.e. “... the Holy Spirit points us to the future redemption”); and d) Doxology (i.e. “...with the Father and Son together the Spirit is worshipped and glorified”).<sup>180</sup> Thompson goes on to claim that, according to Barth’s pneumatology, “the Spirit comes actively to challenge our sinful autonomy and subdue our stubborn wills to conform to the divine.”<sup>181</sup> At this point, we are closer to the theme of this study. For Barth, the concept of freedom is a central preoccupation, particularly with respect to the freedom of God, which in the present context involves the claim that the Holy Spirit is not simply bound to the church or the moralistic status quo of the societies in which churches exist. The Spirit is Lord, and as Lord, the Spirit is free, which means that the Spirit transcends these boundaries. The other side of this claim in Barth is that divine freedom provides the true ground for human freedom – as realized autonomy on the part

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<sup>179</sup> David Coffey, *Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 103; cf. Rahner, *The Trinity*, 66.

<sup>180</sup> John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick Publications, 1991), 25.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

of the person. Individuals themselves are incapable of achieving true autonomy, no matter what attempts are made to create it for an otherwise barren existence with no hope for freedom – because no such concept can be realized apart from the free action of God and of the Holy Spirit.

A full exploration of Barth's vast and labyrinthine work is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis, but we can limit discussion for our purposes to what is probably the most interesting part of Thompson's analysis of Barth. This is that the Spirit is thought of as quelling human notions of autonomy that are, by nature, "sinful." Yet, in Barth's theology, this theme connects in a rather surprising way with the individuals' narratives from the interview study analyzed above. For Barth, one of the primary expressions of sinful human autonomy is found in institutional religion, in which human pride is substituted for faith. Barth famously alleges that the Christian church has much to repent of in this matter. In the case of the individuals' narratives from the interview study of Chapter Two, it would seem as if the autonomy exercised by the PJCES proponents is at least analogous to Barth's claim, in that it is asserted in opposition to the power exercised by ecclesial authority to control certain aspects of institutional religion, and through it, individual religious experience. Autonomous individuals from the perspective of a post-secular theological context, are implicitly and explicitly demanding that the Spirit be known freely where and when it may be found – which is also, in a manner of speaking, Karl Barth's demand. In its most profound sense, this can be seen as emerging from this study in the form of the spiritual-political activism that has been identified.

Additionally, the inclusiveness of religious pluralism needs to be compared to the inclusivism within theology already alive and well in some forms of Christian thought. Chester Gilles defines theological inclusivism thus:

The position of inclusivism, concisely stated, is that those who are brought to ultimate salvation/liberations are saved whether consciously or unconsciously by the merits of Christ's death and resurrection, and whether or not they express faith in Christ.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Chester Gillis, *A Question of Final Belief: John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Salvation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 13.

The partisan stances of the ecclesial institutions currently do nothing to invite inclusivist theological interest among members of anti-institutional movements, such as those I have called PJCES. Given the example of some factions in the Anglican Communion, which has been described as “A Broken Middle,”<sup>183</sup> rational discourse that would involve exclusivism at this point will not be embraced. The first principle of theological inclusivism must be this: to include all dissenters. Unfortunately, this is not always the norm in ecclesial circles today.

In the Christian tradition, there is a recurring appeal made to the presence and power of the Spirit as providing resources by which the barrenness of institutional religion – whether this be a question of its characteristic obsession with its own existence or its sometimes shameful complicity in evil-doing – can be transcended. Thus, the appeal to the Holy Spirit is nothing new. However, the problematic question that arises in dealing with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that pneumatology has been relatively neglected historically. In the words of the German theologian Adolf von Harnack, pneumatology has always been the “orphan doctrine” of Christian theology: i.e. it never received the same amount of attention as the doctrine of God proper (theology), or Christology, or even ecclesiology.<sup>184</sup> As a result, the idea has been put forth that G.F.W. Hegel came to understand that “Absolute Spirit,” as a speculative pneumatology, is “faith in the mediation of Spirit.” Furthermore, Martin Heidegger would eventually connect the meaning of Hegel’s *Aufhebung* (the combination of thesis and antithesis in sublation) with *Erhebung* (being raised to a higher level).<sup>185</sup> While it has been (rightly) argued that pneumatology “is a neglected field of systematic theology,”<sup>186</sup> it is arguably a renewed, if

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<sup>183</sup> See Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of our Ancient Society* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1992), 306.

<sup>184</sup> Alan Olson, *Hegel and the Spirit: Philosophy as Pneumatology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 34. Here Olson states that Hegel’s “*Aufhebung* of Spirit” in this case could surmount the “[...] impass between critical Idealism and Romanticism, Orthodoxy and Pietism.”

<sup>186</sup> Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1976), 10.

only implicit, concern for the rightful place of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology that has allowed Christian ecumenism to gain ground.<sup>187</sup> The Holy Spirit here is not, in a manner of speaking, the “possession” of any one ecclesiastical tradition, which is only right, as the Spirit knows no theological, or indeed any linguistic, spatial-temporal, or intellectual barriers at all.

This is a point made forcefully by Jürgen Moltmann in his account of the Spirit, to which we turn now.<sup>188</sup> As we recall the absurd nature of life and death as discussed by Moltmann above in Chapter One, the question arises as to whether there might still be a way to bring God’s providential care and saving purposes into the picture. In this regard, one of Moltmann’s overarching claims concerns the importance of Trinitarian theology, but not that of typical Protestant doctrinal statements from the past, and not even those deriving from Karl Rahner’s equally controversial work. Moltmann’s particular appeal at this point is to ‘social trinitarianism,’ and specifically to the *perichoresis* (loosely translated from the Greek as ‘rotation’) theology of John of Damascus,<sup>189</sup> which provides a resource for a creative answer to certain of the social aspects of the issues raised by non-institutional spirituality. He argues that, in Trinitarian theology, “perichoresis links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness” of the triune God.<sup>190</sup> Moltmann goes on, however, to posit that the perichoretic unity of the three persons of the Trinity provides a theological resource for comprehending the importance of relationship among humans, and the nature of social life.

T. David Beck comments on this same point to the effect that, for Moltmann, perichoresis means “the unity of the divine persons [...] formed by the circulation of the

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<sup>187</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 3-5.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>189</sup> T. David Beck, *The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of all Things: Pneumatology in Paul and Jürgen Moltmann* (Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co., 2010a), 107.

<sup>190</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175.

divine life that they fulfil in their relations to each other.”<sup>191</sup> This mode of understanding the Spirit as very ‘one’ with the Father in perichoresis is tempting, since: 1) “it prevents Trinitarian theology from beginning from a concept of the unified divine Substance”; 2) it “prevents subordination” of any persons in the Trinity; and 3) it “prevents Trinitarian constructions from leaning toward either tritheism or modalism.”<sup>192</sup> Thus, it can be said that Moltmann’s doctrine of the Trinity allows for the Spirit of God to actually exist as a separate, distinctive theme in Christian thought, which, in turn, provides a basis for thinking of the Spirit’s distinctive presence within the realities of human existence.

In this creative sense, Moltmann’s claim that theology is ‘adventurous’ has given at least one interpreter the impression that, no matter how substantial his contributions as a modern theologian, Moltmann “would rather be criticized for being too bold and missing the mark than for being too timid and not contributing to the advance of ideas.”<sup>193</sup> Moltmann, as a theologian formed in the shadow of Barth’s immense influence in Christology, has certainly been prompted to experiment theologically with the Spirit, since it has often been understood that Barth’s pneumatology ‘subordinated’ pneumatology as a “function of Christology.”<sup>194</sup> Moltmann also contends that anything not simple enough for edification among the priesthood of all believers is “better left unsaid.”<sup>195</sup> While Moltmann’s approach has pushed pneumatology nearer to panentheism than perichoresis, especially when juxtaposed with the soteriologically focused pneumatology of his contemporary, Wolfhart Pannenberg,<sup>196</sup> it does offer certain advantages for us over other approaches. What Moltmann’s approach allows for, in particular, is a relocation of individualistic and anonymous Christianity into a much more

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<sup>191</sup> T. David Beck, *The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of all Things*, 107; cf. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 175.

<sup>192</sup> Beck, *The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of all Things*, 107.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

<sup>194</sup> Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 160.

<sup>195</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), ix.

<sup>196</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 89; 104-105.

consistently conceived, ultimately wholly relational context. The perichoresis theme, in other words, highlights the importance of relationship as non-negotiable, including that between the Trinity and humanity. In Moltmann's theology, this is also a relationship 'in the Spirit' between creature and Creator that is ecological, social, economic, and so on, rather than merely ecclesial.

In light of the many diverse pneumatic interpretations given in this section, we can see that a variety – indeed a plurality – of theological possibilities exist even when we limit the scope of discussion to a small selection of recent theologies of the Spirit. In this regard there is hope for renewal of pneumatological thought, as such a renewal must be ongoing, and forms the basis of much of the past and potential future development of this theological area.<sup>197</sup> John McIntyre sums up the variegated intricacy of the Spirit's work by claiming that God's relationship to both the creature's "sin and salvation" and to our "responsibilities to God and neighbor" are found not only in a way which points somehow to transcendence, but which are also located firmly inside of space and time.<sup>198</sup> He states that:

In the Holy Spirit [...] God relates himself to the intricacies of this person's sin and salvation, and his or her responsibilities to God and neighbor, as they occur within the created natural order and in human history. These two sides of God's work or interest as we might call it, the universal and the particularized, are obviously not unrelated; in fact in so far as God does both, there can be no separation. But they are distinguishable, and this model uses the distinction to its advantage.<sup>199</sup>

The pneumatological "model" he is speaking of – involving understanding God's Spirit as interacting with the natural order – is significantly indebted to Barth. However, from McIntyre's approach in *The Shape of Pneumatology*, we are given to understand that there have been multiple models and a variety of understandings of the Holy Spirit throughout Christian history. This abundance of variation is to be embraced, according to McIntyre, as it confirms the idea that the Holy Spirit is not one single phenomenon in

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<sup>197</sup> Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love*, 15, 144.

<sup>198</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 173.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 173

the experience of God, but has instead meant a great many different things in variegated historical epochs, cultural contexts, and human proclamations.

What we can see, in summary, is that there are resources within the Christian theological tradition that allow for further discourse concerning the non-institutional spiritualities explored in Chapter Two. This is an important finding, even if those discourses cannot be developed further in this thesis. My suggestion, however, is that one of the ways in which Christian theologians might address the “SBNR/nones” would be through a more informed use of resources that are actually found fairly close to home. Nevertheless, there is an important limitation in all such approaches, which suggests that a new step is also needed from theologians. It is to this that I now finally turn.

### 3.2 Towards a Practical-Theological Approach to PJCES

Unfortunately, all of the approaches to pneumatology delineated above lack an empirical dimension informed by sociological theory and methods, and thus tend in practice to privilege a certain approach to the ideal rather than the real. In my view, this weakness in the standard theological resources available must generate an imperative that theology should be augmented and become more meaningful through a real commitment to empirical research alongside its longstanding theological reflection and systematization. It is on this point concerning the apprehending of the PJCES phenomena as connected with anonymous Christianity that I argue for the relevance of *practical* theology in understanding today's post-secular spiritualities.

In regards to the sample of PJCES adherents analyzed in Chapter Two, Rahner's inclusivist theology can easily be denied by both pluralists, for its broadly orthodox approach to theology, and by 'post-liberals' on the right, for not conforming exactly to the scriptural witness of the New Testament. Contrary to both of the above positions, the (Catholic) philosopher Paul Moser, writing on the Spirit, states that: “[...] the intervening personal Spirit of God would be the best source, including the most direct source, to



confirm God's authoritative reality and our subordinate standing before God."<sup>200</sup> Thus, as we appeal to Rahner's claim that Christianity in essence is a pre-scientific project<sup>201</sup> – especially when juxtaposed with the legacy of the Eurocentric Enlightenment experiments of modernity – we can assign a sense of *knowing*, much like many of the PJCES adherents interviewed in the study, to rational accounts of the Spirit's place in all life. To find ways to affirm this theologically, I suggest, would be the beginning of wisdom in our present circumstances.

There is, however, also a political dimension to the non-institutional religious understanding of people in twenty-first century in Canada, and the political potential of our findings could be considerable, particularly if the SBNR become collectivized by the SPA type as suggested. The proposal for post-secular practical theology, then, is not that it become *über*-secular, and abandon its own theological roots, nor is it that it seek somehow to transcend completely its own environment by ignoring empirical reality. Theology with a political edge is therefore needed – without such thinking our theology becomes somewhat fantastical. In a practical theology of the Spirit, the Spirit is already present 'here-and-now,' in a way that meshes with the grain of Rahner's theology of 'being in the world.'

Perhaps we can instead, as Habermas has interestingly suggested, begin to move our theological rationality into the post-secular – which might prove to be a great well-spring for theology in the next years. For the ideals of the post-secular to come into full bloom, however, much theology will need to respond better than it has to date, and in a more timely manner. Theologians should not forget the essential radicalness of all reform movements,<sup>202</sup> the radicalness of which serves, indeed, as a real catalyst for theological development. The radical nature of the SPA type is, from this point of view,

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<sup>200</sup> Paul K. Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 149.

<sup>201</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), passim.

<sup>202</sup> Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 88-91.

not only understandable as an effect of the work of the Spirit within a broadly post-Christian and practical belief system, which should be significant as such, but also as an exemplar, to some extent, of the very thing that theology needs to embrace in order to meet contemporary challenges..

Regarding whether Habermas' idea of communicative action in the form of discourse ethics can provide a basis for religious consensus, or inform ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, it is imperative to consider how the Church can embrace the spiritually *estranged*, who cannot return unless offered a place in this reasoning process. Habermas, for his part, is well aware of the intellectual pitfalls of the approach he is taking to intersubjective communication (whether between large groups or singular individuals), hence the need for the 'ideal speech situation' within communicative rationality, which is at bottom an imperative grounded upon a system of ethics.<sup>203</sup> One might worry that the theological result would be a conceptual free-for-all. However, the theologian Ephraim Radner questions the ability even of the Church itself to reach consensus on doctrinal matters:

What does it mean for Christians to "agree"? [...] In general, the notion of Christian "consensus," such as in Acts 15, has been only vaguely specified and in this case mostly in terms of the forms of decision making than in terms of the actual substance that characterizes human agreement. The key religious difference, clearly, has always been located in the peculiar Christian claim to pneumatic instrumentality; that is, that the *Holy Spirit* is the means by which agreement takes place.<sup>204</sup>

Perhaps total uniformity has never been a legitimate Christian goal in first place, on the grounds that only the *activity* of the Holy Spirit creates genuine Christian unity, and on the grounds that the Holy Spirit is "free," as Barth might put it, or beyond the dictates of our little religious systems. We may apply this insight to theological use of ideas from Habermas. Certainly, the purpose of Habermas' discourse ethics is not to promote misguided or faulty 'consensus' – such folly would constitute for him a misuse/abuse of the function of language. However, the potential of a post-secular theological account of

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<sup>203</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. II, 1-2.

<sup>204</sup> Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012), 222.

the Spirit is that it helps to show that Christian doctrine is never a kind of final achievement. It is, rather, a conversation, conducted as the ongoing work of the Spirit creates continuity in the Christologies, creeds and confessional texts produced by theologians through the ages. As we see from McIntyre, what results from such a process is more than just one thing. The kind of unity that allows for difference, a unity in diversity, may be the only way forward in a post-secular reality, and certainly it is the only possible way for the Holy Spirit's action to be detected within an ever fragmenting Christian church.

While it can be suggested that PJCES practices are merely a form of commodified religion,<sup>205</sup> we must still understand such practices more fully. The inclusive seeker's claim to freedom from religion is perhaps hollow, as they have only been informed of this concept by others who function implicitly as religious leaders. Such SPAs, as charismatic leaders, are extremely significant, since they realize a form of spiritual autonomy in a way that the superficiality of the inclusive seeker cannot embody. In some sense, the SPA is firmly established in a post-enlightenment West, while the IS is still engaged in the process of self-autonomization, even though within the commodified field of religion today it may seem as if this has been achieved.

While it is possible for Christian theology to ignore such problems, I suggest that it has much to learn from them. The idealized SPA is, for instance, a potential paradigm of Christian existence: the pattern is to question *status quo* authority while acting ethically – in the manner of, say, Jesus or Paul – to inspire devotion in the minds of adherents, who are themselves incapable for various reasons of embodying the concept of freedom which is latent in their discourse. Still, autonomy is affirmed via the reflexivity of the seeker's subjectivity within the confines and limitations of the practical implications of freedom. Thus, the leaders can achieve some measure of the ideal; the followers generally less.

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<sup>205</sup> François Gauthier and Toumas Martikainen, *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers, and Markets*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013). 3-4; also see Andrew Dawson's essay in the same work entitled "Entangled Modernity and Commodified Religion: Alternative Spirituality and the New 'Middle-Class'," 127-142.

There are, of course, contradictions and tensions in evidence. The SPAs might not be as entirely SBNR as they claim to be, since traces of religious phenomenology abound – yet they are certainly more autonomous than the seeker type, however much this theme plays into the hearts of the seekers themselves. This specific kind of activity, I suspect, is only possible in a PJCES ethos found in the north Atlantic, Western hemisphere of religious thought. This is due to the fact that the autonomy sought has underlying it very Western notions of the freedom of the individual not likely available to other historical or cultural forms of rationality. The SPA concept also suggests that to lead one must follow, and yet the IS concept does not require any turn to leadership or action. This leads to a redundancy in terms of the dominant SBNR vernacular: the leaders (SPA) are the only ones capable of spiritual autonomy, but only through other media, such as *political activism* – something actually outside the bounds of contemplative spirituality as conventionally understood. But this does not have to remain a normative expectation.

Trappist monk and scholar Thomas Merton points to some of the failures which can easily occur as part of a Christian attempt at spirituality (in his own terms: “the ancient practice of contemplative prayer”):

Under the pretext that what is “within” is in fact real, spiritual, supernatural, etc., one cultivates neglect and contempt for the “external” as worldly, sensual, material and opposed to grace. This is bad theology and bad asceticism. In fact it is bad in every respect, because instead of accepting reality as it is, we reject it in order to explore some perfect realm of abstract ideals which in fact has no reality at all.<sup>206</sup>

Alongside this, we can see from movements as central to the Christian tradition as the building of hospitals for the sick and the political engagement of Christian socialists that there are precedents for a politically and socially engaged Christianity. Even precedents exist in the Christian tradition for something approaching ‘autonomous’ spirituality. In certain traditional forms of Christian monasticism we can see a normative Christian spirituality which holds that what can be seen in the visible church is partial, fragmentary, disappointing, and corrupt – that ‘something more’ is needed for the sake of Christian

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<sup>206</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 38.

perfection. This shows us that there are basic forms of Christian spirituality that need not be overly committed to the institutional status quo, or that need to defend it to the last.

I would suggest that in relation to PJCES, Rahner's theology can aid in understanding contemporary spiritual movements in a more adequately theological way. He states that a certain "educated ignorance" is appropriate to a spirituality which tries to be in relationship with God, but can know very little about the actuality of this anthropological and/or erotic<sup>207</sup> relationship: "It is wise, educated ignorance about oneself, which must be entrusted to God, without knowing how it is. Paul says, 'I do not judge myself. I am not conscious of any guilt, but he who judges me is God alone' [1 Corinthians 4:4]."<sup>208</sup> Again, unfortunately much contemporary Christian practice lacks this simple and biblical sensibility.

Rahner, of course, was prepared also to defend the Church's institutional qualities. Despite the Rahnerian theme of individual human beings as all naturally oriented towards God, in other words, the institutional Church is *necessary*. It is, however, not the starting point; one might go further to claim that it is not truly foundational. This is because Rahner also connects his theology to experiences of God found outside of the Roman Catholic fold. What is foundational, in short, is the presence of God's 'spirit in the world,' and while this may bear fruit in the existence of the institutional Church in Rahner's theology, the latter is no substitute for the former, nor should it be reduced to its relatively narrow limits.

On the basis of such approaches both to the spiritual life and to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and in keeping with the discourse ethics of Habermas' theory of communicative action, it can be argued that Christian theology can have a place at the table with SBNR people – and *vice versa*. Discourse ethics allows us *all* to use the language available to us to discuss openly and honestly, sharing our reflections upon

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<sup>207</sup> "Eros" being in the Platonic sense, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1991). Vol. 3, 194-195.

<sup>208</sup> Rahner et al., *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 297.

‘other’ groups – even those with diametrically opposed viewpoints (e.g., between Christians on doctrinal issues<sup>209</sup>). Theology cannot be wholly subservient to the post-metaphysical reasoning of Habermas or of the Frankfurt school social theorists, but it can be informed by it. The goal here would be a systematic openness to a post-secular theology of communicative reasoning and action – one sufficient to accommodate the ‘anonymous’ status of the Spirit among PJCES adherents. Theologically, this would be to allow for an unabashed attempt at a (Trinitarian) pneumatological understanding of these variegated social phenomena, geared largely to what we need to do in a *practical* sense. Practically, what Christians *do* has always achieved exponentially more than even what can be believed, confessed, and intellectually reasoned. New spiritualities, even where commodified<sup>210</sup> under late capitalism, can be of interest to Christian theologians, just as they are to persons involved in forms of PJCES as described above.

Desires drive much of our conscious behaviour, and spirituality is not different in this regard, especially with the spiritual desire for autonomy which is marketable under the current ‘holistic milieu’ in Western nations such as Canada. But as Karl Rahner argued, “radical dependence” on God is the only genuine form of autonomy for the Christian: “In our human experience it is the case that the more something is dependent on us, the less it is different from us, and the less it possesses its own reality and autonomy.”<sup>211</sup> Real autonomy is *God’s* invention in the Christian world-view, brought about through the Holy Spirit’s activity.

Who is to say where the Spirit of God is finally at work? That question, clearly, is beyond the scope of a thesis. The present argument is simply for the theological coherence of saying that pneumatologically, the activity of the Spirit can be seen among

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<sup>209</sup> Nicholas Adams comments that “For Lindbeck, doctrines are best seen as “rules” for guiding Christian thought and practice under different historical conditions.” In this Adams sees Lindbeck as a Protestant theologian willing to attempt “repair” of what can be seen as a German-Catholic centrism explicit in Rahner’s work. Nicholas Adams, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 211-213.

<sup>210</sup> See Roland Boer, *Rescuing the Bible* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub. Ltd, 2007a), 17.

<sup>211</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 79.

both institutional Christians and anonymous Christians, and that this has to be of key importance for the interpretation of non-institutional religion by contemporary theology.

### 3.3 Concluding Remarks

In the end, empirical and practical theological reflections on non-institutional spirituality have much to offer within a post-secular understanding of these and related phenomena. The legacy of secular reason, most fittingly taken from the pen of the ‘last great rationalist’ in Habermas, and the resiliency of Christendom in the latent power of the Spirit and the consciousness of his presence among the post-Christian nations of the West as per Rahner, are not incompatible, but *can be united*. This must, however, involve forging a difficult central place for both as being part of the potential for a practical theology crafted in and for the twenty-first century. This must be done working alongside PJCES adherents, and in a pneumatology that has listened to the demands of those fragmented from the ecclesia. The work of the Spirit that can be discerned in human life is sublime, undeniable, and unpredictable, and it would be a grave mistake to miss the opportunity of knowing that Spirit better. We must learn from God’s action wherever it can be found in the world today, as well as from our own rationality. It can be hoped now that the theology of the Holy Spirit will emerge more clearly in Christian consciousness, through taking seriously the implications of Christian pneumatology in the world and for the world. After all, it is to this world that the Christian faith addresses its message, and in the world’s acknowledgment of faith that it has its fulfillment. Theology, as faith seeking understanding, can still help to accomplish this goal.

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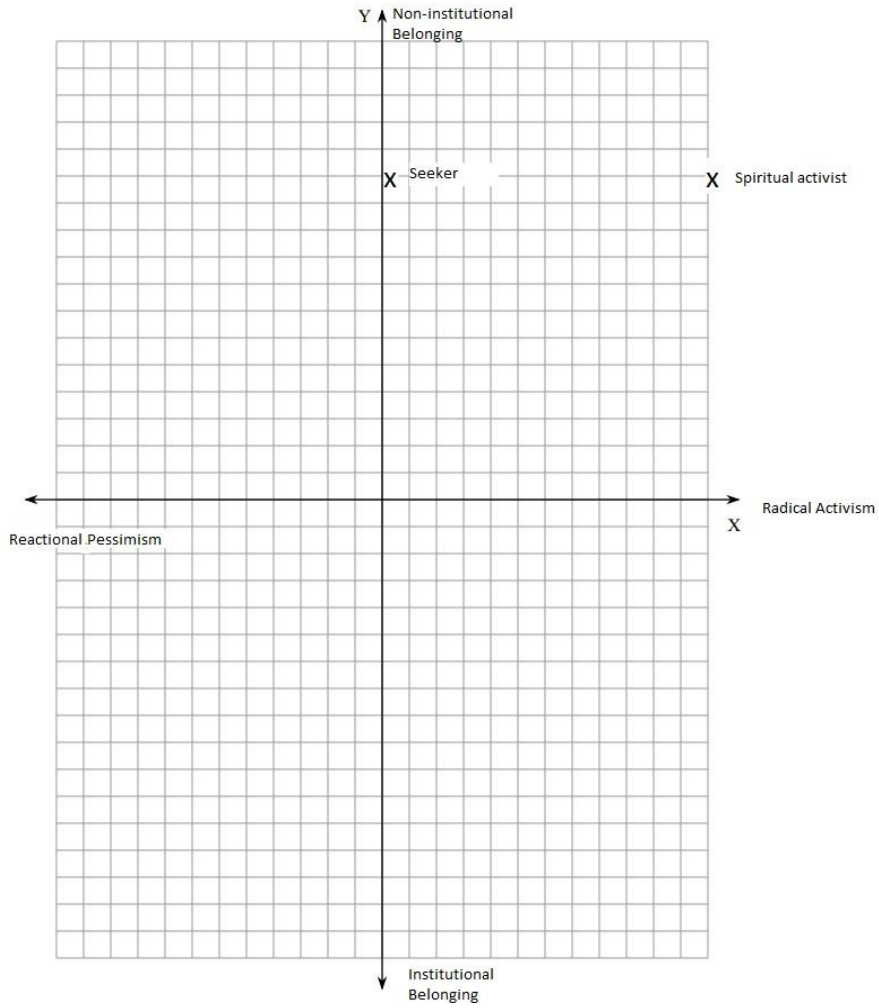
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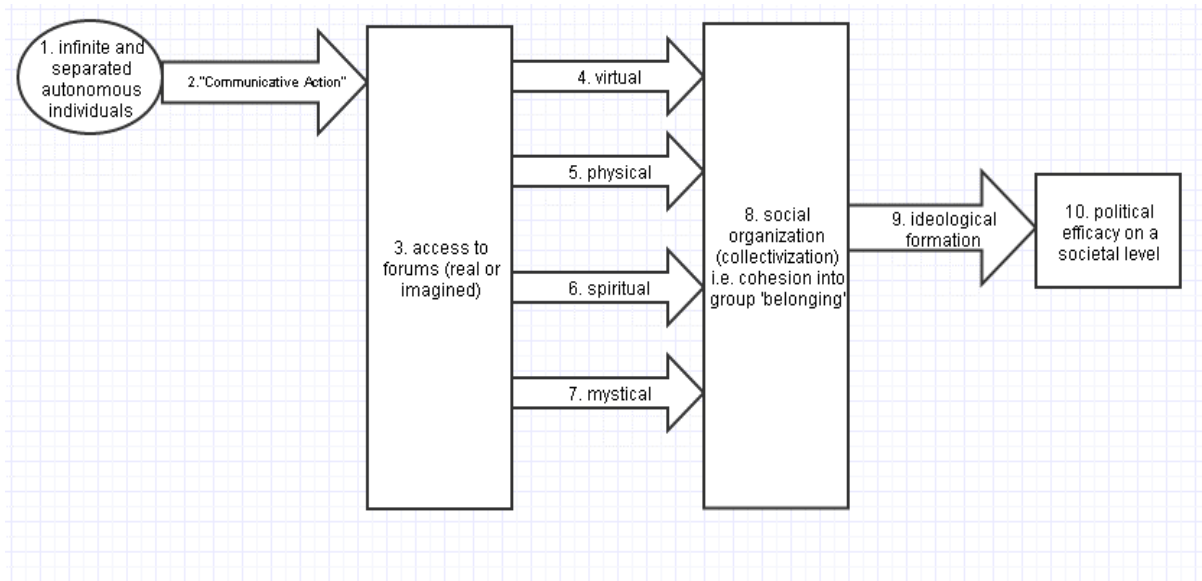
# Appendices

## Appendix A: Conceptual Chart of Spiritual-Political 'Belonging'



## Appendix B: Ideological Formation

A tentative diagram for the socio-political collectivization of the autonomous non-institutional religious individual, and the hypothesized ideological formation of future group identities.



# Appendix C: Initial Ethics Approval Notice



Research Ethics

## Use of Human Participants - Initial Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Gary Badcock  
 File Number: 105065  
 Review Level: Delegated  
 Protocol Title: The Autonomous Individual in Non-Institutional Religion Among the Educated Middle-Class in Southern Ontario: A Sociological Study of (Implicit) Religion  
 Department & Institution: School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Huron University College  
 Sponsor:  
 Ethics Approval Date: April 28, 2014 Expiry Date: August 31, 2015

### Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Instruments	Interview Questions	2014/03/31
Letter of Information & Consent		2014/03/31
Western University Protocol		2014/03/31

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

*This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.*

Appendix D: NMREB Amendment Approval Notice



Western  
Research

Research Ethics

Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board  
NMREB Amendment Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Gary Badcock  
Department & Institution: School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Huron University College

NMREB File Number: 105065  
Study Title: The Autonomous Individual in Non-Institutional Religion Among the Educated Middle-Class in Southern Ontario: A Sociological Study of (Implicit) Religion  
Sponsor:

NMREB Revision Approval Date: July 03, 2014  
NMREB Expiry Date: August 31, 2015

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Western University Protocol	Revised inclusion criteria to include permanent residents of Canada and current students who come from families which earn more than 30,000 \$ per annum	2014/06/25
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Revised inclusion criteria to include permanent residents of Canada and current students who come from families which earn more than 30,000 \$ per annum	2014/06/25

The Western University Non-Medical Science Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the amendment to the above named study, as of the NMREB Amendment Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of HSREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

*This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.*



## Appendix E: Semi-Structured, Guided Interview Question Sheet

### A. Background:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your occupation?
3. Do you earn more than 30,000 dollars on average in the year?
4. Do you consider yourself to be a “religious”, “spiritual”, or “mystical” individual?
5. Does anyone your family fall into any of the above categories?
6. How many people do you interact with who fit the above categories?
7. Do you belong to any groups or organizations which are religious?

### B. Experience:

1. Describe an(y) experience you have had with organized religion
2. Do you generally have a positive or negative outlook on institutional religion?
3. Do you think that you are alone in your experience with religion?
4. Do you think most people have had similar experiences to yours with regards to religion?
5. How much time do you commit to religious experiences in a week?
6. What, in your mind, is the relationship of personal religion with political opinion/activism?

### C. Surface level opinions:

1. What do you think of organized religion?
2. Can a person be religious outside of institutions?
3. Are religious beliefs more important when shared with others, or when they are individual and internal?
4. What is more important, appearing to have a certain religious identity, or actually having a religious identity?
5. Do you think that religious people have something to offer non-religious or secular people/society?

### D. Feelings:

1. What do you feel when you are part of something “religious”, “spiritual”, or “mystical”?
2. Do sacred things exist? Explain...
3. Do immaterial things exist? Explain...
4. Do you feel empowered by your own individual thoughts of what religion is?
5. Do you embody anything sacred?

### E. Knowledge:

1. How much do you know about contemporary non-institutional religious movements?
2. What do you know about the current numbers of institutional religious participation in Canada? The USA?

### F. Sensory:

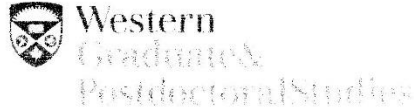
1. What did you see at your last gathering? How did this impact your experience?
2. Hear? Ibid.
3. Touch? Ibid.
4. Smelled? Ibid.
5. Tasted? Ibid.

### Concluding remarks:

If a forum (public, private, virtual/digital) existed for the propagation of a pluralist, non-institutional religious community, would you actively want to participate?

Do you think that such a group could use its energies to accomplish a political agenda?

## Appendix F: Official Letter of Information to Participants

**Project Title:**

*The Autonomous Individual in Non-Institutional Religion among the Educated Middle-Class in Southern Ontario: A Sociological Study of (Implicit) Religion*

**Principle Investigator:**

Dr Gary Badcock

**Graduate Student Researcher:**

Christopher Medland

**Letter of Information/Recruitment****Invitation to Participate:**

You are invited to participate in an interview-based study concerning personal notions of autonomy in connection with non-institutional religious thought and practice here in Southern Ontario. You have been selected by the research team because your basic characteristics and demographic fulfill the desired sample credentials for this particular study.

**Purpose of the Letter:**

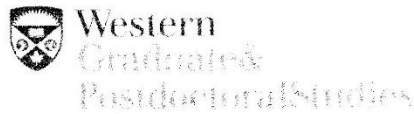
The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

**Purpose of this Study:**

I am a graduate student in theology collecting data to develop the research portion of my thesis via interviews. This study is informed theoretically by both qualitative sociological methodology as well as empirical theology. My research aim is to better understand the religious and spiritual experience (or lack thereof) of individuals who do not belong to established institutions in Ontario. The aim of the thesis is to describe, as accurately as possible, how religion and spirituality are happening in what seems today like a fully (post-)secular society.

**Inclusion Criteria:**

To be included in this study, potential participants must first self-identify as being a Canadian citizen or permanent resident over the age of 18. Secondly, they must also self-identify as earning more than 30 000\$ per year as an individual, or as earning more than 30 000\$ per year within one's family gross annual income. Potential participants must also self-identify that they have achieved/experienced some level of post-



secondary education, though this does not specify the completion of a degree/program per se. Of course, for a study of this nature, one must also be willing to discuss matters of personal belief at least at a general level, but hopefully with a desire to expand their dialogue as much as possible about beliefs, notions, and experiences had connected/pertaining to religion; whether from a negative or positive perspective.

**Exclusion Criteria:**

Individuals who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents will be excluded from this study. Likewise, individuals who are not over the age of 18 will also be excluded. If potential participants do not self-identify earning over 30 000\$ per year as an individual or within one's family gross annual income, then they must also be excluded from this study. Potential participants who have not achieved/experienced any level of post-secondary education (but not necessarily culminating in a degree/program completion) are not eligible to participate in this study.

**Procedures:**

You will be asked to take part in one-on-one interviews (interviewer + interviewee), which usually do not last for more than 1-2 hours and will be recorded for analysis, although interviewees may opt out of recording if they prefer. Any further or "follow-up" interviews will be at the discretion of both the interviewer and interviewee. Your opinions and the natural essence of your religious/spiritual awareness individually and/or within your group/gatherings are of the utmost importance to this study in general.

**Possible Risks or Harms:**

Participating in this study will not endanger anyone beyond that of the experience of everyday life.

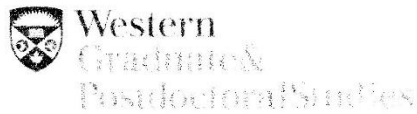
**Possible Benefits:**

You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole, i.e. to the fields/disciplines of: religious studies/interpretation, empirical theology, the sociology of religion, and to political science.

**Compensation:**

While we cannot compensate you for your time, your participation and insight will be invaluable to this project as we seek an understanding of the contemporary religious climate in Ontario, and beyond.

**Voluntary Participation:**



Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or may discontinue your participation at any time during the interview or withhold any sort of sensitive information concerning the religious/spiritual communities implicated by the study.

**Confidentiality:**

All of the information you provide, your identity, and the specific identities of your respective communities, will remain strictly confidential. Your recorded data will remain filed under a numerical system, by which you can only become identified by the researcher in charge. All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study, but individual data will be available as it pertains to the participants themselves, should they at any time want to review their own data (by making a request to the Principal investigator/student researcher). If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

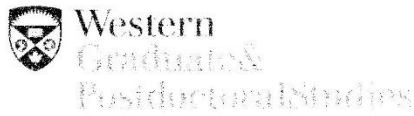
**Contacts for Further Information:**

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact both/either the Principle Investigator (Dr. Badcock), and/or the Student Researcher (Christopher Medland), using the contact information listed at the beginning of this letter.

**Publication:**

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact both/either the Principle Investigator (Dr. Badcock), and/or the Student Researcher (Christopher Medland), using the contact information listed at the beginning of this letter.

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*



**Consent Form**

**Project Title:**

*The Autonomous Individual in Non-Institutional Religion among the Educated Middle-Class in Southern Ontario: A Sociological Study of (Implicit) Religion*

**Study Investigators' Names:**

*Graduate Student Researcher:*

Christopher Medland

*Graduate Student Supervisor, Principle Investigator:*

Dr Gary Badcock

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please indicate if we may record your interview (or not) by circling either RECORD or DO NOT RECORD:

RECORD

DO NOT RECORD

Participant's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: Select Interview Excerpts

*Sure, I consider myself to be spiritual, I am a spiritual person. But I think perhaps because of the negative connotation that the word religion has which is association with the institution I am a little more skeptical to consider myself to be religious, in the way that I don't practice in the same way that I did when I was younger and more a part of an institution. So I was born and raised into a Catholic church, my family is Catholic, practicing Catholics, and I was baptized and first communion and then confirmation went through a lot of the sacraments and then in my early adult life in university I stopped going to church and I didn't live with my parents anymore. So I would go when my family was together, but other than that I didn't really go on my own, and I actually started having some major criticisms of the Catholic church, and the institution itself, and the hierarchy and the power and I started to kinda explore other faiths other spirituality and found it much harder to say that I'm a catholic and I'm a part of this church. It was just like a lot didn't come easily anymore, if at all.*

*[...] shamans were healers in the community, today and for many generations they were considered healers and spiritual people who were able to kind of access a different spiritual realm and talk to spiritual beings and so I have learned a little bit about that and how through meditation or altered states of consciousness you can kind of communicate with the spiritual world which I think is just very interesting because there are time and time again there are people in communities who do actually that for me. That becomes very interesting because I realized how much more there is than what we are exposed to and how much more there is than just kind of going through the motions of a religion but actually getting to know what spirituality [is] and if we believe in a god who has created or is aware of all levels of things then this is just another way of getting to know that creator that higher being. (04)*

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*If I am someplace where there are other people gathered, I find myself really emotionally moved by the sense of bonding among people and the strength of their faith, [...] I've felt that quite a few times so just being aware of people's body language and just a sense of energy - like I have felt some really really powerful energy physically. I know it's a little bit crazy but I have seen some things, I went to - my mom owns a natural health centre - so I go to a lot of spiritual workshops and a lot of spiritual people and a lot of modalities natural healing modalities and energy work. [...] in the front room of my mom's house where she had the main part of her centre they had grids lined up and all that and I think crystals are one of the, one of the targets for people really judging natural health and spirituality, a lot of people think its hoky and airy-faerie and I kind of did too, but it was crazy. Like the air in that room was thick, the only thing I can compare it to was like being in a sauna, but it wasn't hot but it was like heavy thick air and the man did this talk, the talk was on ascension, so just kind of coming out of the everyday, coming into your spirituality, removing yourself from the tangible world, and I saw something around him. And it was one of those things, there is that part of me that is still so skeptical I think "yeah right you're just seeing it because this is just - you're getting caught up in it - in everybody else's energy" - right? Because the vibration I think is so high, and people's moods and everything its really - I don't even know the word for it - it's kind of hyper, its agitated but not agitated. And so I was looking at him thinking, ok "you're*

*just imagining this" going through my eyes shaking my head, but all around me it was like - like when you look at a light bulb, so I guess it was ... I don't know what it is.(07)*

*[In this] tradition I use the Sun as the centre of my faith, which makes sense, you gotta worship something why not worship the Sun? You know what we'd have without the Sun? NOTHING! So solar deities tend to take central place for me. So the overlap of imagery and poetry and art and titles of the gods and stories about the gods, for the solar deities specifically, and the male solar deities at that, invoke a love and a devotion which I find exciting and exhilarating and it provokes a state of mind in me that makes it easier for me to live my life. (01)*

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*I think I get a lot of sensations and euphoria from my sensory experience: what I see and hear and feel. So that other sense, that kind of internalized sense, I would relate to my spirituality, you know, my connection to people in a way that's not just my senses going. You know, it's more of a metaphysical experience than I relate, I would call that my spiritual experience.*

*[...] there's something beyond our physical existence that we're fulfilling by getting together. Even the idea of solidarity, it's a material idea to get together physically but there's something very immaterial about that, a group of 500 people gather in London Ontario to show their solidarity with the millions of people in Gaza. That distance between the two groups is a material existence [sic.] but I think there's something that happens whether it's in a non-material way that has an effect on the world, an effect on people's consciousness or, you know, how you carry on your life on the next day. I think there's a connection between immaterial and material in those situations if you know what I mean. [...]*

*Interviewer: So in our context here in Ontario in North America do you think religious or spiritual groups are making an effect on politics the way that they would want to?*

*I think it's a battle right now cause you still have extreme religious fundamentalist groups that can cause a lot of harm as far as them indoctrinating certain people. Right? Expelling toxic ideology, right? And that's very dangerous for society, even if you look at the current Harper government it's a lot about controlling the media, controlling information and I think [...] that is the same for the religious context you there are a lot of groups that are very extreme in expressing their ideas and making sure that they're educating people in a very specific way and I think that can be very dangerous, but at the same time I think that there are lots of faith-based groups and religious activists that use their faith to do a lot of powerful good things, so I think it goes both ways. (08)*

## Curriculum Vitae

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