



Secularisation and Europe Today

**SECULAR AND MULTI-RELIGIOUS:
WELCOME TO THE "SMR SOCIETY"**

EVERT VAN DE POLL

Over the last few decades, we have been witnessing the persistence and even the resurgence of religious beliefs and practices in societies that had undergone a long process of secularisation. This seems to run contrary to classic secularisation theory according to which the secularisation of society and the decline of the Church in Europe were the unavoidable corollary of modernisation and hence an irreversible process, not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world.

Some authors speak of a 'post-secular' society. But this is not to say that secularisation is coming to an end. Surely, the overall decline of Church membership, the influence of secularism in science and politics, the spread of secular lifestyles, the move away from traditional Christian morals, anticlerical sentiments and

opposition to the influence of religion in society, all continues. But at the same time there are contrasting developments: practising and committed Christians remain an important and influential minority, and their percentage is even growing in some countries. New forms of Christianity are developing, largely but not only due to immigration. Muslim and other religious communities are developing. Demographic trends are clearly in favour of the religious population, as Jim Memory brings out in his article on pages 9-11.

Then there is the so-called 'return of religion' in the public sphere, i.e. in civil society, in the arts, in popular music, in philosophical debates, as well as social media and the Internet. Muslims, but also Jews and Christians, are marking their differences, for everyone else to see.

CONTINUED INSIDE

EDITORIAL

Debunking 'Secular' Europe?

This issue of Vista returns to the recurring themes of secularisation, secularity and secularism. Taking different approaches and starting points, our authors ask what it means to be secular in Europe today, how societies can be both secular *and* religious, and whether there are signs that secularisation is slowing or even reversing.

In our lead article, Evert Van de Poll strongly challenges the conventional secularisation thesis and introduces his own neologism: the SMR Society – which is secularised (or secularising) yet simultaneously multi-religious.

Recent years have seen some groundbreaking works exploring religion and secularity in Europe. Darrell Jackson looks back at Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, 12 years after its publication, and assesses its impact and relevance today. And in our book review section, Jim Memory reviews two books that have tried, with partial success, to make Taylor's work more widely accessible.

Jo Appleton looks at secularism and religiosity from a different perspective, asking how Europe's growing Muslim population affects the debate. In a similar vein, Jim Memory offers a demographic perspective on European secularisation, using population and migration statistics to identify future trends, outlining key missiological implications.

This issue is completed by Jeff Fountain's article introducing some recent popular books that suggest religion and spirituality continue to resonate with Europeans today.

Chris Ducker

At the same time, the number of 'nones' (non-religious or unaffiliated) is increasing, but among them there is a widespread interest in spirituality, and an attachment to social values rooted in Christianity.

No return but 'SMR'

So, religion continues to be important in the secularised societies of Europe. We should not think of (or dream of) a return to a former situation in which Christianity was the dominant religion, and the only one in many places. The near future is one in which religious and non-religious will live side by side. Both are here to stay, so they have to work together in society. The present situation is characterized by a plurality of worldviews, and by the renegotiation of the place of religion in the public sphere. Moreover, Christians have to accept that they are a minority among other religious minorities. Welcome to the SMR society: secularised (or secularising) and multireligious at the same time.

Granted, the label 'SMR' is my own suggestion, for want of a better one. In fact, there is not yet a widely agreed concept to denote the situation summarised above. A range of theories have been developed to analyse it. Different terms are proposed, depending on what aspect or what implication one is concentrating on. Let us mention some of them.

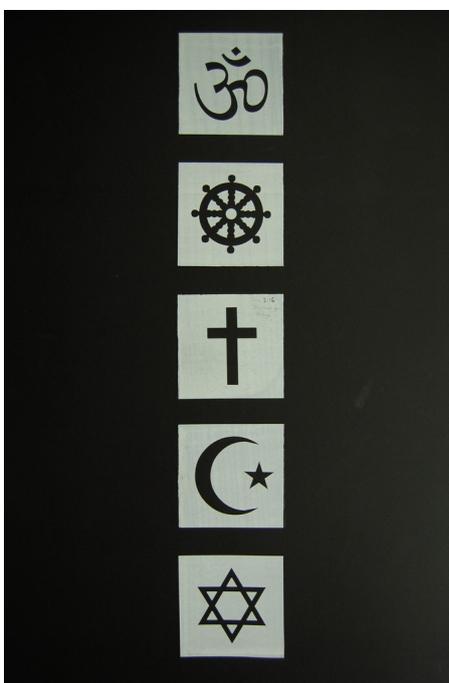
Post-secular intellectual dialogue

Several authors use the term 'post-secular'. German philosopher Jürgen Habermas is widely credited for having popularized it.¹ What did he mean by that? He says that he has always written as a 'methodological atheist', which means that when doing philosophy or social science, he presumed nothing in advance about particular religious beliefs. Yet in the light of the continuing role of religion in society, he evolved to a 'post-secular' stance, meaning that fundamental questions in society cannot be reduced to merely secular rational ideas and theories.

Religious people have important things to say about scientific, ethical and

political issues – let alone questions that transcend the visible and the tangible. They also are rational, the basic difference from secularism being that they take into account the influence of a transcendent reality. Habermas takes issue with all forms of militant secularism that consider secular science and humanism to be the only relevant discourse in the public realm. Religious convictions, values and norms should not be ruled out from the public debate, just because they are not based solely on human reason and science. So there should be an intellectual dialogue between believers and non-believers. Former pope Benedict XVI accepted the challenge

“Religion continues to be important in the secularised societies of Europe”



Multireligious Europe: The entrance to an interfaith prayer room at Munich Airport. Image www.flickr.com/photos/oansari/3080297997

and undertook a series of in-depth conversations with Habermas on the foundational values of modern society. The publication of this dialogue (*The Dialectics of Secularization*, 2007) has exerted considerable influence.

Any dialogue can only be fruitful when no party imposes his or her own language on the discussion. This is particularly difficult for secularists to admit, since they are used to putting everything that refers to the transcendent within the brackets of

'private persuasion', so as to conveniently ignore what the other is saying. In his own dialogue with Joseph Ratzinger, Habermas makes some important points:

'Persons who are neither willing nor able to divide their moral convictions and their vocabulary into profane and religious strands must be permitted to take part in political will formation even if they use religious language... The democratic state must not pre-emptively reduce the polyphonic complexity of the diverse public voices, because it cannot know whether it is not otherwise cutting society off from scarce resources for the generation of meanings and the shaping of identities. Particularly with regard to vulnerable social relations, religious traditions possess the power to convincingly articulate moral sensitivities and solidaristic intuitions.'

This is what Pieter Boersema calls a 'pluralistic dialogue', in which people try to get beyond stereotypical images of the other and towards a deeper understanding of their motivations and the meaning of their viewpoints.

Resource and reassurance

A second aspect of the SMR society is the recognition of the importance of religion, and Christianity in particular, for the cohesion of society. French sociologist Yves Lambert argues that we should replace the old secularisation model of a one-way process in which religious communities are more and more marginalised, by a pluralist secularisation model in which religion remains important. 'In this model, religion should not hold sway over social life, but it can play its full role as a spiritual, ethical, cultural or even political resource in the broadest sense of the term, while respecting individual autonomy and democratic pluralism' (Willaime, p.13).

“Welcome to the SMR society: Secularised and Multireligious at the same time”

Habermas agrees, when he writes: 'For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom

and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, all of that is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a

continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it.

And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is idle postmodern talk' (pp.150-151).

Italian author Roberto Cipriani speaks of the ambiguity of Western Europe. While there is a strong push towards breaking with the past, and developing a secular society and secular lifestyles, people are simultaneously drawn in the opposite direction as they feel the need to remain connected to the past. 'The (anthropological) truth is that the options of fundamental values, and of experiencing the sacred that transform life, are limited, even in modern times. They are all weakened by reciprocal pressures. Because of this, the push towards the new does not always have the upper hand. There is also pressure to remain in continuity with the past. Hence the endurance of traditional religious values and institutions, which often serve as a refuge in difficult times' (p.xx).

A refuge for some, a reassuring sign for others. Observers all over Europe notice examples of what Grace Davie has called 'vicarious religion', that is, the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand but approve of what the minority is doing. It is like the reassuring presence of someone to

whom you can always go in time of distress, or mourning, or celebration.

Even though Davie herself suspected that this phenomenon would gradually disappear, we still see many examples of this, such as non-affiliated Germans continuing to pay a Church tax (though this is no longer obligatory), or the Belgian state spending tax money to pay the salaries of pastors and priests because it recognises the usefulness of churches for society at large.

Religious communities and politics

Closely related to this is a third aspect of the SMR society: the changing relation between religion in general and the Church in particular on the one hand, and the political realm on the other. French sociologist of religion Jean-Paul Willaime writes: 'We are at a turning point where religions, far from being seen as more or less obsolete traditions that are resisting a conquering modernity, can increasingly appear as symbolic resources preventing politics from turning into a mere bureaucratic management of individual aspirations and avoid that modernity dissolves itself in a generalized relativism' (p.13).

His compatriot Bérengère Massignon calls this the 'second phase of secularisation'. In the first phase, the secularised state took over the role of the churches in society (education, health, transmission of values, social care, defining ethical norms, etc.). The 'neutral' state had the tendency to secularise the public sphere, in which it

took the central place, as though Caesar were God, who lays down all the ethical rules and tells people how to behave. In the second phase, the state recognizes its limits in moral issues and the importance of religious institutions and civil society when it

"While there is a strong push towards breaking with the past and developing a secular society, people are simultaneously drawn in the opposite direction."

"In the SMR society, a key question is: How can churches and religion in general contribute to the common good in society?"

comes to transmitting fundamental values. This leads to a desecularisation of politics: the state is neither God nor Caesar. For a long time, the main thrust of politics with respect to religion was separation of Church and state, non-interference. In the SMR society, this changes into a constructive approach: how can churches and religion in general contribute to the common good in society?

During a recent seminar, I heard a Dutch politician saying: 'precisely because Christians have become a minority, politicians can appreciate what they do for people in need, and listen to their ethical appeals, because they don't have to fear the dominance of the Church as in the old days.'

Evert Van de Poll
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Endnote

¹ Michael Reder and Josef Schmidt, "Habermas and Religion" in Jürgen Habermas et al. *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*. Cambridge: Polity, 2010.

Further Resources

Roberto Cipriani, *Diffused Religion: Beyond Secularization*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, Polity Press, 2006.

Jürgen Habermas with Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularisation*, Ignatius Press, 2007.

Bérengère Massignon, *The EU: Neither God nor Caesar*. Paris: Sciences Po, 2008.

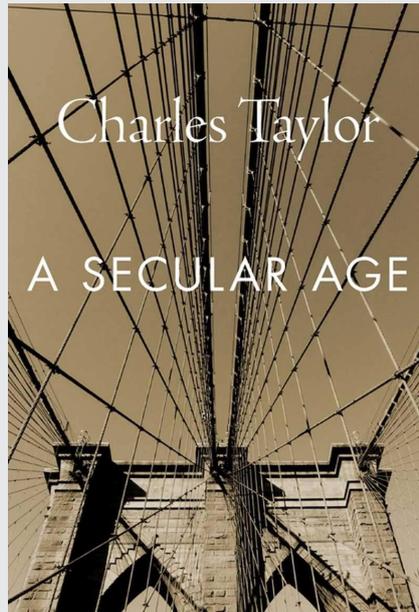
Jean-Paul Willaime, *Europe et religions*, Fayard, 2004

At the 2019 Redcliffe College Summer School, Evert van de Poll will be a visiting lecturer on the *Crucial Issues for European Mission and Theology* module. See: www.redcliffe.ac.uk

Hard news was obviously in short supply on Friday December 28th, 2018. Hence, *The Times* ran a feature about a YouGov survey of 1,660 people in the UK. The findings suggested that there are more people attending church (albeit less frequently), a reduction in the number of professed atheists, an increase in the number of agnostics, and an increase in the numbers of those who say they pray occasionally.

This single survey is hardly a game-changer, but it does seem to confirm what other surveys of the last five years suggest: that it's time for a review of the way that many Christians in Europe have become conditioned to thinking about faith across the continent. Most of us tend to see the history of Christianity in Europe in two main periods. During the first period from around the 4th to the 18th century, Christianity provided the framework for understanding morality, faith, social order, God, and just about the whole of life. After the Enlightenment of the 18th century, science and reason overthrew religious credibility and authority and the slow, steady demise of Christendom set in. If life in the earlier period was lived under a sacred canopy, in the latter it was lived from a secular launchpad.

For academics who retained an interest in studying European Christianity, a debate raged about how best to support this version of events with the best statistical data available. Callum Brown provoked attention (and sales) with his book *The Death of Christian Britain* (2001, 2009). Grace Davie puzzled, at a late stage of her thinking, over *Religion in Britain: A*



Persistent Paradox (2015). Some argued that modernity was necessarily and inevitably secular. Others described national Churches dealing in things of 'ultimacy' and 'transcendence' on behalf of their respective nations. The debate was lively and fascinating.

In the middle of these debates, I was trying to advise Baptist churches in the UK about the nature of their mission task through into the early 2000s. It was challenging. Many church pundits and commentators were convinced that secularism had triumphed, the churches were in terminal decline, and that the churches of Europe should either oppose science and reason to their dying breath, or that they should strike an uneasy truce with secularisation.

"Many Christians were convinced that secularism had triumphed and churches should either oppose science and reason, or strike an uneasy truce with secularisation"

Twelve years ago, Charles Taylor took around 800 pages with *A Secular Age* (2007) to tell a different story. Taylor was a Catholic, Canadian philosopher with a huge reputation. In 800 pages he says a lot of things that deserve much more space than we have available in this short article. However, it's worth trying a short summary.

Here we go! Taylor suggests there are three ways to understand how 'secular' is used. Firstly, prior to the fifteenth-century Protestant Reformation, 'secular' was used to describe all the non-sacred things that religious people did. Eating, washing, travelling, and trading, for example, were all 'secular' activities, pursued by religious people with a sense of the transcendent presence of God, or the divine. Secondly, following the Reformation ('The Reformation is central to the story I want to tell', *A Secular Age*, p.77), and fuelled by the European Enlightenment, 'secular' became a way of describing the non-religious.

You were either religious or secular, being both was no longer possible. People could now choose to live their lives without the approval of a transcendent being. Instead, they could live mostly self-validating lives with reference only to immanent realities such as human reason, the nation-state, science, etc., and in some cases developed extreme hostilities to religion.

Taylor argues that European Christians have largely accepted this second

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understanding. As a result, we have typically tried to live out our Christian witness by picking a fight with human reason and science. The problem with this, if Taylor is correct, is that our arguments then rest on the same assumptions that reason and science rest upon. Simply put, we often resort to logic, historicity, and empirical defences of our faith. These are arguments based in the appeal to immanence.

Taylor argues for a third way of understanding 'secular': that religious and non-religious people alike are secular because we inhabit an era in which faith, atheism, and humanism are all available as options. More than this, they are options that do not have to be watertight categories. Taylor notes that there have always been people who, 'want to respect as much as they can the 'scientific' shape of the immanent order... but who cannot help believing that there is something more than the merely immanent...' (p.548).

For Taylor, the loss of transcendence in a secular age is disastrous for human beings. Elsewhere, his work on 'social imaginaries' is his personal effort to re-engage human beings with story, mystery, the poetic, the numinous, and the imagination. European Christians who refuse to deal with the miraculous, the presence of angels, the inspirational lives of saints (they don't have to be

Roman Catholic saints!), the real presence of God in the everyday, the possibility of sacred spaces, the necessity of resurrection, the reality of evil with personality and intelligence, and the life everlasting, among many others, have simply lost sight of the missional power of these elements of our Christian story.

Taylor would encourage us to refer to all these, often, and to tell stories that inspire and stimulate imaginative leaps (slowly shuffling forward might also be OK) that enlarge the possibility of faith for those willing to listen. He talks of 'the power and genuineness of the experience of wonder' (p.607), for example. A growing number of evangelicals see that Taylor's insights encourage an approach whereby apologetics that rely on story and narrative are more persuasive, and convincing, than apologetics that rely on argumentation and empirical data alone.

Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* is not an easy read. It's big, for one. However, he writes in such a rich and compelling way that it's easy to miss the fact that he's actually telling us a very sophisticated story. He also quotes poetry at length (see pp.761-765, for example). That's all deliberate, because he's trying to persuade and inspire the imagination of his readers in a way that he argues is necessary in our secular age.

"Reading Taylor is an immensely hope-filled and optimistic exercise... 'we may yet see a return to an 'Age of the Spirit'"

Reading Taylor is also an immensely hope-filled and optimistic exercise. Reviewing him for *The New York Sun*, Michael Burleigh captures this well: 'A salutary and sophisticated defence of how life was lived before the daring views of a tiny secular elite inspired mass indifference...' Taylor offers the intriguing prospect that we may yet see a return to an "Age of the Spirit."

Taylor frequently talks of the shared human 'aspiration to wholeness and transcendence' (pp.262-627). As a Roman Catholic, Taylor would not be embarrassed by Christians engaged in thoughtful and genuine efforts to re-enchanted Europe by planting many and varied seeds of transcendence. Such language might seem a long way from what many of us understand when we use phrases such as 'proclaiming the gospel'. Taylor wouldn't distance himself from this, but his work does challenge us to reconsider whether our understanding and proclaiming of the gospel has lost all sense of enchantment and transcendence, and is instead too much reminiscent of a verbal 'fist-fight'.

If we were, instead, to re-learn the art of narrating the gospel in a way that captures its weird, miraculous, other-worldly, subversive, and transformative intent, it is still possible that Christ's followers in Europe will live to feel that they have contributed, in some way, to a future 'Age of the Spirit'.

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SECULARISM AND ISLAM IN EUROPE

JO APPLETON

The same year that Charles Taylor published *A Secular Age* (2007), Philip Jenkins also wrote about the interface between religion and secular society in his book *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis*. Jenkins explores the relationship between secular Europe, the historical Christian faith and Islam, and asks what form of Islam is likely to develop over time in Europe. Will European Muslims reinforce their identity and stand apart as an increasingly strident and distinct Islamic community in Europe? Or is Islam likely to follow the path of

Christianity and (in his view) become a 'deeply secularised faith which has little by way of orthodoxy, preaches no morality and that conflicts with secular assumptions and does not try to impose its views in the 'real world'?

While Jenkins rejects the idea of Islam becoming 'deeply secularised,' stating that 'Western observers are over-optimistic if they believe that the alternative to Wahhabi fanaticism is a pallid liberal Islam, akin to American mainline churches' (p.272), he does conjecture that 'the long-term

pressures are likely to create an ever more adaptable form of faith that can cope with social change without compromising basic beliefs' (p.287).

Twelve years later, the population of Muslims in Europe continues to grow – from an estimated 3.8% in 2010, to 4.9% in 2016. The recent Pew Center report on the Muslim population in Europe outlined three scenarios of migration which could influence the potential numbers of Muslims (see *chart overleaf*). If no further migration takes place, and growth only occurs through natural increase, it is likely

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that by 2050, 7.4% of Europe's population will identify as Muslim. As it is very likely further immigration will happen, the actual proportion of the population is predicted to be between 11% and 14% overall.

Why is this significant when talking about secular culture? The Pew report also projects which individual countries are expected to see the most growth in their Muslim population: France, the UK, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands, precisely those countries which we found to be at the very top of our Index of Secularity back in 2010 (See Vista Issue 3, October 2010). If the most secular countries are the ones with the highest percentage Muslim population, will this lead to increasing conflicts between Muslim immigrants and the host country?

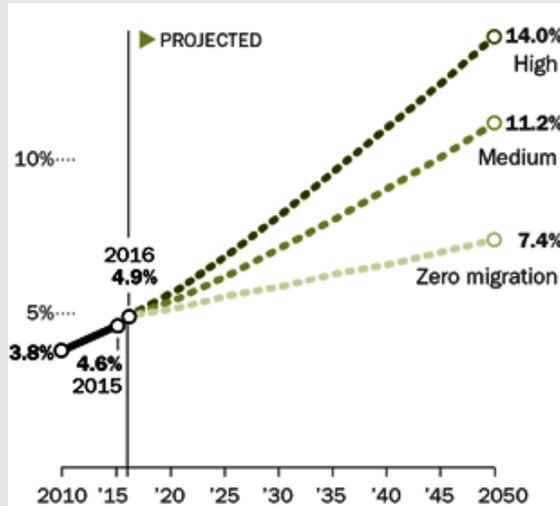
Secular thought assumes the separation of religion and the state. If the activity of the state is public – for example the 'public sector' is shorthand in the UK for government-run organisations – then religious belief becomes a more private affair. Part of the ongoing clash between secular society and Islam is the philosophical difference regarding where religious activity should happen within the private-public spectrum.

For many Christians in secular Europe, who have adapted to the secular-sacred divide, faith has become largely a private affair despite calls for it to become more visible within the 'public square'. Devotion to Islam, however, calls for a more public display – for example some may choose to wear the hijab, requiring prayer spaces in the workplace, or only eating halal food, which sits uncomfortably with societies where the public display of faith is not the cultural norm.

As with all religions, there is a spectrum of belief and practice, from ultra conservative or fundamentalist, to more liberal forms. Conservative Islam is identified in Europe, among other things, by burka-wearing women, and the desire for sharia law to be accepted by all. For a small minority, it also means their belief in jihad spills over into acts of terrorism against unbelievers.

At the other end of the spectrum are two movements which could be seen as actually taking Islam towards a non-religious agnostic, or secular, stance. The 'One Law for All' movement

Growth in Europe's Muslim population depends on future migration: Muslim share of Europe's population under different migration scenarios



Source: Pew Research Center estimates and projections.

Notes: In zero migration scenario, no migration of any kind takes place to or from Europe. In medium migration scenario, regular migration continues and refugee flows cease. In high migration scenario, 2014 to mid-2016 refugee inflow patterns continue in addition to regular migration. Europe defined here as the EU28 countries plus Norway and Switzerland. Estimates do not include those asylum seekers who are not expected to gain legal status to remain in Europe.

Estimated and projected Muslim population shares

Country	2010	2016	2050 zero migration	2050 medium migration	2050 high migration
Cyprus	25.3%	25.4%	25.5%	26.6%	28.3%
Sweden	4.6	8.1	11.1	20.5	30.6
France	7.5	8.8	12.7	17.4	18.0
United Kingdom	4.7	6.3	9.7	16.7	17.2
Belgium	6.0	7.6	11.1	15.1	18.2
Norway	3.7	5.7	7.2	13.4	17.0
Netherlands	6.0	7.1	9.1	12.5	15.2
Italy	3.6	4.8	8.3	12.4	14.1
Denmark	4.0	5.4	7.6	11.9	16.0
Finland	1.2	2.7	4.2	11.4	15.0
Europe overall	3.8	4.9	7.4	11.2	14.0
Germany	4.1	6.1	8.7	10.8	19.7
Austria	5.4	6.9	9.3	10.6	19.9
Switzerland	4.9	6.1	8.2	10.3	12.9
Malta	0.2	2.6	3.2	9.3	16.2
Bulgaria	11.1	11.1	12.5	9.2	11.6
Greece	5.3	5.7	6.3	8.1	9.7
Spain	2.1	2.6	4.6	6.8	7.2
Luxembourg	2.3	3.2	3.4	6.7	9.9
Slovenia	3.6	3.8	4.3	5.0	5.2
Ireland	1.1	1.4	1.6	4.3	4.4
Portugal	0.3	0.4	0.5	2.5	2.5
Croatia	1.5	1.6	1.8	2.0	2.1
Hungary	0.1	0.4	0.4	1.3	4.5
Czech Republic	0.1	0.2	0.2	1.1	1.2
Estonia	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.8	1.0
Romania	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.9
Slovakia	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.6	0.7
Latvia	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4
Poland	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2
Lithuania	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2



Mosque in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Image: www.flickr.com/photos/o_0/2067888939

(onelawforall.org.uk) is particularly focused on marriage law and rights for women, and opposes giving space to sharia, stating that religious courts are 'discriminatory and unjust' and 'work against rather than for human rights.' Speaking at a 2018 conference organised by the movement, prominent activist Maryam Namazie asserted 'the urgency of secularism as a minimum precondition for women's and minority rights'. (onelawforall.org.uk/a-landmark-conference-for-universal-rights-and-secularism-and-against-fascism).

The second, the Council of Ex-Muslims, stresses the importance of universally held values, and the right for people to choose to leave Islam. The UK branch held two 'coming out' parties in 2018, where ex-Muslims were given 'apostasy certificates' and the opportunity to celebrate the loss of their faith rather than feel ashamed. (See www.ex-muslim.org.uk/cemb-partners for a list of where the Council is active).

Sociologist Nilüfer Göle appears to bridge the gap between the extremes of the religious-secular divide. In her most recent book *The Daily Lives of Muslims: Islam and Public Confrontation in Contemporary Europe* (2017), Göle explores some of the controversies that have arisen over issues such as public prayers, sharia laws, building mosques or wearing headscarves. She suggests that the fact that Muslims are more publicly visible – which causes discomfort to secularists – is actually a sign of their 'growing participation in European daily life'. An example of the Europeanisation of Islam is given in the changing architecture of mosques, which are becoming more 'hybrid' rather than imitating traditional styles.

Most Muslims, she states, are satisfied with the secular nature of European society, and a 'slow and invisible form of personal Islamic law is being constructed and adapted to European 'secular' laws'. An example of this is that the definition

of halal is changing from the original Arab version, and a more European version which is 'understood as permission, a lawful extension into new areas of life and pleasure that Muslims seek to enjoy. Halal certification makes these areas compatible with Islamic prescriptions.... [and] enables European Muslims to penetrate and so appropriate secular realms of life and pleasure.'

While this sounds a very positive step towards realising Jenkins' prediction of Islam becoming a 'more adaptable form of faith that can cope with social change without compromising basic beliefs', Western governments appear to have a much narrower view on the meaning of 'halal'. On 1 January this year, Belgium became the sixth country in Europe to ban killing animals without stunning them first rather than maintaining an exception for religious groups to the EU regulation that an animal must be stunned before being killed. For some, the argument is more about marginalising 'certain groups' who use halal meat, than animal welfare.

A decade after *God's Continent's* publication, the debate of the place of Islam in Europe continues. In any conversation, both parties need to listen to the other as otherwise the participants end up shouting over each other or talking at cross-purposes. In the conversation between Islam and secular Europe, this is a very real danger.

But it is also an opportunity for us to have a conversation – with both parties – as people who understand the times we live in and can also bring God's perspective to bear.

Jo Appleton

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Two swallows don't make a summer, says the proverb. Yet two recent Dutch books about reflection on roots could perhaps signal a significant climate change in Europe concerning interest in the Bible and Christianity.

One is written by Inez van Oord, the publisher of *Happinez*, a very successful New Age glossy magazine offering happiness through a range of eastern spiritualities. In her book *Rebible* (2017), she surprised her readers by saying that 'in recent years we have embraced Buddha like a teddy bear, read spiritual gurus and visited ashrams and monasteries in India, and eventually you ask yourself: what are my roots, where do I come from? That is actually Christianity. We have been born on Christian ground. I have let the years go by, but I found the time ripe to explore Christian spirituality. The nice thing is: we can do that again. It's okay to talk about Moses. You want to know who you are. Who knows? Perhaps it's more familiar to return to Christianity. That has rooted my youth, that's where I came from. So the question is: what can I do with it?'



Our true identity needs to be found in our roots, says van Oord. Which doesn't mean returning to the stultifying legalism of yesterday's church, she argues, but rather drawing fresh inspiration from the ancient wells of scripture. Inez (hence the title '*Happinez*') took a journey of personal discovery through the Sinai wilderness with her theologian brother in pursuit of such inspiration. *Rebible* was the result.

Van Oord's ability to 'feel trends' earlier than most enabled her to start several publications widely resonating with readers. If she is right in her intuition, we may well be entering a season where the spiritual emptiness of our secular age will prompt more to reflect on their spiritual roots.

Robbed

That this new sound comes from a leading spokesperson for the New Age movement is surprising enough. But a second and more broad-ranging book published recently comes from a former editor of a national left-wing newspaper who now believes Dutch society threw the baby out with the bathwater some four or five decades ago.

In her book *Ongelofelijk* ('Unbelievable', 2018), Yvonne Zonderop describes her sense of liberation as a young woman after leaving the Catholic church in disgust, along with other members of her generation. During the sixties and seventies, faith disappeared behind the front door, she writes. Secular became the norm. Freedom, individualism and autonomy became the celebrated values.

Yet, Zonderop now realises, this personal liberation has had great social consequences. Something important has been lost. Her generation has raised a whole new generation without Christian roots, which for centuries had nurtured and formed western culture and morality. A common foundation for society has been eroded. Who knows what the Exodus meant? she asks. Who can explain the biblical scenarios Rembrandt painted? And who realises that without Christianity we most probably would not have a democratic constitutional state?

After decades, Zonderop has come to see that her generation had robbed themselves of the cultural context in which they had grown up. Yet now it is becoming obvious that the alternatives to religion for offering meaning and values are scarce. Millions of Dutch people continue to waver between faith and unbelief. In politics, the Christian heritage keeps resurfacing, she observes, because it is the source of our culture, democracy and ethics.

She quotes a doctoral candidate from the University of Amsterdam who

researched individualisation as the motto for Dutch education after World War Two. Observing that baby boomers valued individuality, he concluded: 'but, woe to you if you did not wear jeans or did not criticise religion!'

Which recalls for Zonderop a comic scene from Monty Python's *Life of Brian* film in which the Messiah figure tells his crowd of followers that they are all individuals, they are all different; to which the crowd responds by chanting in unison: 'Yes, we're all different!' Then a lone voice pipes up: 'I'm not.'



YVONNE ZONDEROP
ONGELOFELIJK
Over de verrassende comeback
van religie

Pioneers

Zonderop now views the ideal of individual freedom as having held Dutch society in a strong grip, of which the collective departure from the church is just one example. But freedom has now become a devil's dilemma: when you make a mistake, you're on your own. Today's youth, she argues, seek the support circle of friends to fall back on. Social capital is more important to them than individual freedom. Religion can become a source of meaning for them again.

The loss of togetherness is more broadly felt in society these days, writes Zonderop. People miss the social cohesion formerly offered by trade unions and churches. They miss the 'vertical dimension', where someone higher than you is looking after your welfare, whether that be a group leader or God.

The book's subtitle, "About the surprising comeback of religion," refers

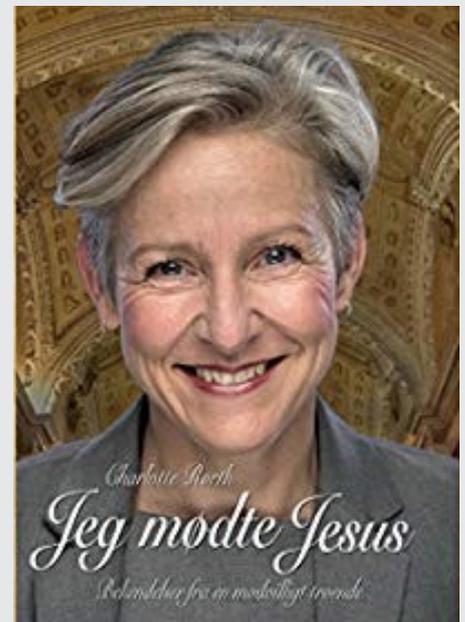
to the closing chapters which describe a number of new expressions of church in the Netherlands, and particularly Amsterdam, today. A wave of pioneers is appearing, both within and outside the church, showing rumours of the death of Christianity to have been greatly exaggerated. Zonderop ends her book with a surprising citation from a Muslim German-Iranian art critic connecting the loss of the spiritual dimension with the rise of populism.

In his intriguing book, *Wonder Beyond Belief: On Christianity* (2017), Navid Kermani observes: "It is completely understandable that many Europeans are afraid for Islam and seek security in the familiar. If you no longer know your own culture, you can't be open to other cultures. It is a great shortcoming if you don't know what Pentecost is. German literature of the 19th century can't be understood if you don't see the Christian allusions. Many writers of that time were ministers' sons. German literature and music are saturated with Biblical references. If we don't know that legacy, we don't know ourselves. And then we become susceptible for racism, xenophobia and nationalism."

Shining

Another secular journalist, Charlotte Rørth from Denmark, recently wrote about a totally surprising encounter she had in a Spanish church. In *I met Jesus* (2017), she described herself as a complete outsider to the church: "For us, the basis of everything is that one asks questions, looks for proof, finds answers, continues learning as time goes on. But suddenly I know something that I did not yet know half an hour before and which I cannot prove."

Till then she had only known about Jesus from a distance. Now she saw him so clearly in front of her – surrounded by his disciples – that for her there was no more doubt: "He was simply there, and he is alive! And He loves me so much that I have no choice but simply to love others too." When she came out of the church, others asked her: "Why are you surrounded by such a light? You are really shining!" Her book, which quickly reached the bestseller lists, has been hailed in Denmark's secular press as breaking the taboo on speaking about religion and spiritual experiences, a significant



step forward for freedom of speech in a very secular country.

This is perhaps what philosopher Charles Taylor predicted in *A Secular Age*: "We are just at the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no-one can foresee."

Jeff Fountain

"DEMOGRAPHY IS DESTINY": A DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE ON SECULARISATION

JIM MEMORY

The famous maxim that "demography is destiny" may, or may not, be attributable to Auguste Comte, but it was certainly Comte who first wrote about how population trends and distributions could determine the future of a country.

In the social sciences, predictions about human behaviour are based on theories and models, which are often proved wrong over time. However, demography is the branch of social science where predictions are more reliable. This article explores the impact of demographic change on religious populations and how this could relate to the future of secularisation in Europe.

The Maxim of Secularisation: The Church in Europe is Dying

Another maxim, at least as far as the popular press is concerned, is that Christianity is dying in Europe, with Europe becoming more secular. A headline in this morning's Spanish newspaper *El País* stated that "Spain is the third highest country in Europe for those abandoning Christianity." They quoted a Pew Research Center report which

Large drops in Christian affiliation in Belgium, Norway, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden: % who were/are...

	Raised Christian	Currently Christian	Change		Raised Christian	Currently Christian	Change
<i>Christian share has declined</i>				<i>Christian share relatively stable</i>			
Belgium	83%	55%	-28	Lithuania	95%	93%	-2
Norway	79	51	-28	Croatia	92	91	-1
Netherlands	67	41	-26	Bosnia	44	44	0
Spain	92	66	-26	Moldova	98	98	0
Sweden	74	52	-22	Romania	98	98	0
Denmark	80	65	-15	Estonia	50	51	+1
France	75	64	-11	Hungary	75	76	+1
Portugal	94	83	-11	Serbia	92	93	+1
Slovakia	84	73	-11	Bulgaria	78	80	+2
Czech Rep.	34	26	-8	Georgia	87	90	+3
Finland	85	77	-8	Latvia	73	77	+4
Germany	79	71	-8	<i>Christian share has increased</i>			
Ireland	88	80	-8	Armenia	95	97	+2
Italy	88	80	-8	Russia	65	73	+8
Austria	86	80	-6	Belarus	83	94	+11
Switzerland	81	75	-6	Ukraine	81	93	+12
UK	79	73	-6				
Poland	96	92	-4				
Greece	96	93	-3				

Note: Orange labels are Central and Eastern European countries. Blue labels are Western European countries. Significant changes are highlighted in bold.

Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries, Pew Research Center.

compared a whole variety of religious metrics for Eastern and Western European countries, yet the author of the *El País* article concentrated on the difference between those who said they were raised Christian and those who confess Christian faith today.

These are sobering statistics, particularly for Western European countries (those in blue in the table). But secularisation is a complex phenomenon. The unique history and context of each country mean that neighbouring countries may be on different secularisation trajectories. A closer look at this table suggests that desecularisation is happening in many Central and Eastern European countries. And even in the same country, secularisation and desecularisation may be occurring simultaneously, depending on the measure you use.

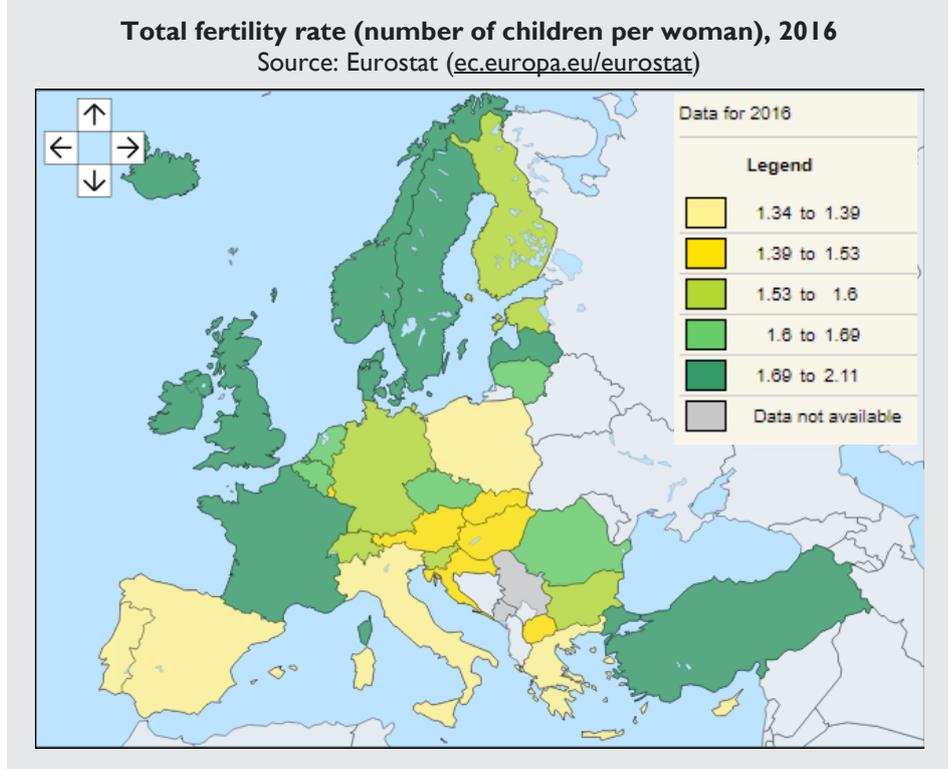
A single arresting statistic to summarise a complex reality can be misleading. Many factors influence religious trends in Europe and this Pew report explores some of them, not least the link between Christian affiliation and national identity. Yet none are, in themselves, reliable predictors of future trends. The most reliable indicators of Europe's religious future are demographic phenomena, specifically:

- Europe's ageing population;
- Inward migration of religious populations from other parts of the world;
- Differential birth-rates between populations.

The Greying of Europe

Low fertility rates, low mortality rates and increased life expectancy mean that Europe's population is getting older. In all of the EU's 28 member countries, the total fertility rate (the average number of children born to a woman during her lifetime) is below the level necessary to maintain that country's population. And if current fertility rate trends continue in much of Central and Southern Europe, their population size will be cut by half in the space of two generations.

The 2018 *Ageing Report* from the European Commission suggests that the "old-age dependency ratio (the number of people aged 65 and above



relative to those aged 15 to 64) in the EU is projected to increase by 21.6 percentage points, from 29.6% in 2016 to 51.2% in 2070." This will have significant implications for Europe's labour force and public spending, especially the provision of public pensions.

Immigration

This almost imperceptible demographic change is closely linked to another, more visible one: immigration. The need for skilled and unskilled workers to maintain Europe's economic growth serves as a significant "pull factor" for migrants, especially as the native working population is in decline. Despite the stubborn resistance to immigration in many Central and Eastern European countries and the hardening of migration policy across the EU, European states face a stark reality. Without immigration many

European countries will see a sharp population decline in the coming years. (European Environmental Agency, 2016).

Differential birth rates

Lastly, we should note the higher differential birth rates of migrants. Over the last 50 years, many religious people from the rest of the world have migrated to Europe. According to the recent Pew Research Center report *Europe's Growing Muslim Population*

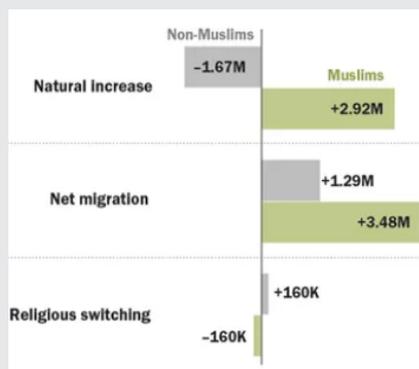
(2017), nearly half of this growth is due to higher fertility rates relative to non-Muslims. The Muslim population of Europe today is around 5%, though that is predicted to grow to over 10% by 2050. Less noticeably, though no less significantly, many Christians from the Global South have migrated to Europe. These are less easy to quantify, and I have been unable to locate research on the differential birth-rates of Christian migrants, but very significant numbers of African, Latin American and Asian Christians can now be found in towns and cities across Europe.

Demographics and Secularisation

Sociologists of religion have frequently focussed on religion as a social phenomenon where the conscious choices of individuals in a given, if dynamic, context cause the rises and falls in religious adherence. The main non-social mechanism for religious change is demography, specifically migration and differential birth-rates. Where migration is low and fertility no different to that of the rest of the population, the non-social mechanisms are less important. However, when migration and differential birth-rates are significantly higher this can have a dramatic demographic effect.

Eric Kaufmann's book *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?* (2010) convincingly argued that the cumulative effect of migration from religious countries and higher fertility rates among those with religious faith will ultimately result in a reversal of the secularisation processes

Fertility and migration drove Muslim population growth in Europe between 2010 and 2016: Estimated population change due to three factors



Source: Pew Research Center estimates.

Notes: Natural increase is the difference between births and deaths. Net migration includes refugees and other regular migrants. Estimates do not include asylum seekers who are not expected to gain legal status to remain in Europe (defined here as the EU28 countries plus Norway and Switzerland).

in Europe and the West. Rather than the rest of the world becoming more like Europe, Europe will become more like the rest of the world.

Recent Research on Religion and Fertility

Interest in the link between religion and fertility has increased remarkably in the last twenty years. An online *Religion and Fertility Bibliography* now runs to more than 700 books and articles. The societal consequences that sustained low fertility levels are having across a whole range of issues is explored at length in Poston (ed., 2018) *Low Fertility Regimes and Demographic and Societal Change*. The final chapter in Poston's book deals with Religion and Fertility.

In it, Ellison et al investigate the effects of fertility changes on religiosity making use of four responses from the World Values Survey data in a very similar way to our own Nova Index of Secularisation in Europe (NISE) as described in the October 2010 issue of *Vista*. Their four measures were attendance at religious services, religious salience (the importance of religion in a respondent's life), religious belief (specifically whether they believe in God or not) and private religiosity (measured by frequency of prayer). Multi-level regression analysis was then conducted on two independent variables, namely individual fertility (as recorded in their WVS response to the number of children they had), and country level fertility using Total Fertility Rate.

The results were clear: "both the individual level and country level fertility variables are significantly associated with all individual level religious variables in the anticipated directions" (p.223), that is to say, less religious people demonstrate lower fertility. Nothing surprising there. Where Ellison et al break new ground is in their reversal of the traditional causal relationship. Normally it is argued that as people become less religious, they have fewer children but these researchers suggest the inverse: declining fertility is what is leading to reductions in religious participation, salience and belief. In conclusion, they suggest "at least tentative evidence that the connections between religion and fertility may be bidirectional" (p.228).

Missiological Implications for Europe

These, and other, trends lead us to identify four key missiological implications for European mission:

1. **The Greying of Mission.** If half the European population will be over 65 by 2070 this will require a complete rethinking of mission priorities. Care for the elderly will become one of the principal activities of Christian mission.
2. **The future of Islam in Europe.** It is clear from recent migration and differential birth-rates that the number of Muslims in Europe will continue to rise. This poses a significant challenge for secular European societies but also for the church. Churches everywhere will need to help their congregations to engage in dialogue and outreach to their Muslim neighbours. They must also resist the rhetoric of populists and nationalists who would seek to legitimise racism through "defending our Christian identity."
3. **Migration and the future of the European Church.** Slow, gentle and silent demographic effects can have a profound impact over the long-term. The arrival of millions of Christian migrants from the rest of the world has been largely ignored yet these "new Europeans" are renewing and changing the face of Europe's churches. Their passion, vibrant spirituality and confidence in the agency and power of God are no less of a challenge to secular Europe than Islam. If European churches and migrant churches can learn to work and witness together

this can have a powerful testimony in tomorrow's Europe.

4. **"Go Forth and Multiply".** Rodney Stark (1996) has shown how the favourable fertility and mortality rates of the early Christians relative to the pagan population helped to fuel a 40% growth rate over several centuries. Could this happen again? If Ellison et al are right, then an increase in the religious population in Europe will require an increase in fertility rates among European Christians. Perhaps one of the most radical things that young Christians can do today is to get married and have a (large) family.

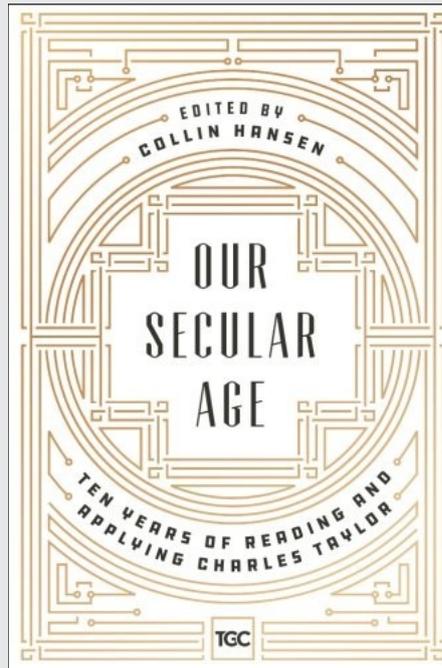
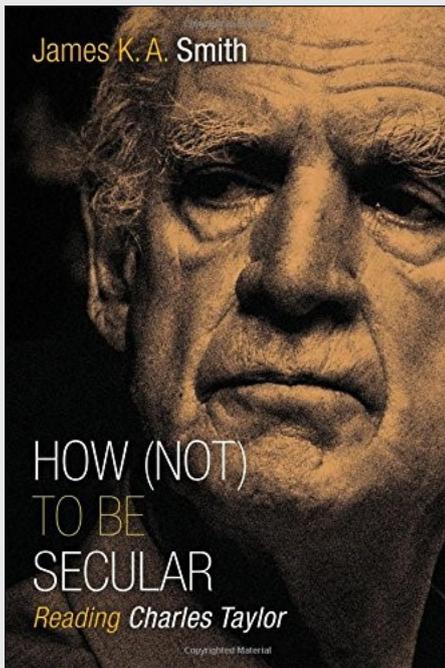
Secularisation is not the "telos" of history. Predictions of the demise of Christianity in Europe don't take into account the promise that Jesus made to Peter that "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

The destiny of the church depends on more than demographics but we must not ignore the insights that demography provides to the future of Christian mission in Europe.

Jim Memory

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The authors engage with Taylor generously, but they also highlight some gaps in Taylor’s analysis. Perhaps the most penetrating is Carl Trueman’s chapter which observes that Taylor’s story of the secular age is missing key influences, namely the impact of technology, mass media and Edward Bernays’ transformation of advertising: “Bernays helped make a world where the same individuals who never darken the door of a church because they are suspicious of authority will line up for days outside of an Apple store to pay an exorbitant sum of money for a minor upgrade to the device they already possess. The absence of Bernays from *A Secular Age*, along with any major discussion of commercialised popular culture, is a significant gap” (Hansen, p.20).

Of the two books here reviewed, Hansen’s is much the easier read, but those who are unfamiliar with Taylor will still find it difficult to follow. Though Smith set out to help baristas, church planters and social workers to engage with Taylor, I can’t imagine many of them doing so. There is still a gap in the market for a *Charles Taylor For Dummies!*

Jim Memory

Vista

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James K.A. Smith (2014) *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans;

Collin Hansen (ed., 2017) *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor*, Deerfield: The Gospel Coalition.

To date there have been two principal attempts to make Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* more accessible to the general reader. In *How (Not) to Be Secular*, philosopher James K.A. Smith presents Taylor’s *magnum opus* as a three-dimensional map for “the complex and complicated terrain of our secular age” (p.3).

Recognising that a map that runs to some 800 pages of dense historical narrative and philosophical analysis is hardly accessible to the masses, Smith attempts to “make Taylor’s analysis accessible to a wide array of ‘practitioners’... artists or entrepreneurs, screenwriters or design consultants, baristas or political staffers... ministers, pastors, church planters and social workers” (pp.x-xi).

Smith does an admirable job of condensing Taylor’s arguments and explaining them in readable prose. There are extended treatments of Taylor’s key concepts: “secular”, disenchantment and

the “buffered” Modern Self, Reform, the malaise of Immanence, Cross-Pressures and the Age of Authenticity. Yet it is only in the final ten pages that Smith begins to make clear why Taylor’s work is so important. Our secular age is cross pressured (“caught between an echo of transcendence and the drive toward immanentization” (p.140) with respect to meaning, time and death. Exclusive humanism is restless because it is haunted by transcendence: “the sense that there is something more presses in” (Taylor, p.727). Smith’s three-page glossary of Taylor’s technical terms and phrases is worth the price of the book alone.

Exclusive humanism is restless because it is haunted by transcendence: “the sense that there is something more presses in”

If Smith is a condensation of Taylor, Hansen is an exposition. In *Our Secular Age*, thirteen different authors explore the relevance of Taylor’s insights for the life and mission of the church, but also for the arts, politics, medicine and popular culture. Written from a broadly Reformed perspective it is perhaps unsurprising that in one of the chapters there is an extended critique of Taylor’s (Roman Catholic) take on the Reformation, but the overall impression is that Taylor’s work has helped Christian thinking across a broad range of disciplines.