

Searching for the Paradise Lost

A Post-Christian Crisis or a Christian Society?

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'The weakness of the spirit. What power!'
(Béla Hamvas)

I Wandering around the faith of God...

If an extra-terrestrial visitor were to ask us humans what we have been doing here on Earth for tens of thousands of years, we might be able to answer briefly: we sought a lost Garden of Eden, we escaped suffering, we sought God, the logos, the spirit, eternity, in an unknown and brittle universe into which we were born. Then we created new ideals like science, human rights, or technology, but we did not find meaning in our lives there either.

The author is not a historian of religion, nor does he specialise in the history of ideas or philosophy. This paper is therefore more of a roaming; a string of free thoughts, an essay, rather than a scientific dissertation. The essay does not argue with the theorems of the sciences or the dogmas of religion; it respects them and even refers to them. This essay (1) recalls that humans had met the Christian faith *before* the teachings of the *Christian* religion, then (2) traces the reasons for Christianity's *weakening*, namely the renaissance of the 'God of nature' (deism) in philosophy and the arts. It argues that (3) *Christian freedom* was still a creative force in the age of the Enlightenment, but that (4) an *attempt at secularisation* against religion also began, and that for the last two centuries this process has broken down the organic fabric of Western culture. It notes that (5) meanwhile *science* has 'limped' along to a standstill, while still having no proof of the origin of life and no answer to the 'purpose' of human life. Finally, it poses two questions: (6) Is the instinctive need of the human community for transcendent answers extinct; in other words, is the Christian God really 'dead', and (7) has Western man burned out and matured to the point where he will again seek God's community-building faith and goals (post-Christian or Christian society)? Contemplating the spacious historical panorama, we find direction in the thoughts of the geniuses who shaped the *spirit of the age* (Béla Hamvas). The reference to 'lame science' above is based on Albert Einstein's *bon mot*, namely that science 'is lame without religion, religion without science is blind'. To paraphrase

Einstein's saying, human rights, which have become the new ideals of non-religious modernity – in addition to or as part of science – also 'limp' without religion. Our essay will, inevitably, raise further questions: What awaits us at the end of the human adventure?¹ Will there be faith in God and will there still be a Christian community?

The overture to modernity was when late eighteenth-century Europe embarked on a path of scepticism about Christianity: Jesus maybe, but no to the church! The principle of God has become a pantheistic thought, that is, *deism*, which grew stronger by weakening *Christian theism*. Individual freedom, development and science are the new ideals that have crowded out Christianity from the spiritual mainstream. A society separated from the Christian religion, that is one which attempts secularisation, continues to this day. The hypothesis of *secularisation* is that a strong, neutral social community can be built *without* the Christian religion, even founded on *secular ideals*. The modern state is built on the *sovereignty of the people* rather than on the divine legitimacy of Christianity. In the relationship between the state and the individual, *human rights* and *constitutions* represent the new foundation. Following in the footsteps of Voltaire and Immanuel Kant, man's *inner moral command* represents the moral basis of community-building and state-building constructs of natural law. The historical roots go back to Christian theology, but the organic threads of community development are beginning to break.² Religion-based communities are starting to disintegrate, and the multi-generational family pattern is weakening. Compared to the small community, the individual becomes more important; *individual human rights* and *the free individual* will be the axioms of modernity.³ Collective consciousness is disintegrating into individual consciousness, with cleverness replacing wisdom (Thomas S Eliot). The 'enlightened' individual embarks on a journey of two hundred years in search of a new community ethos, with a curiosity piqued by the doubts of science and under the spell of prosperity. By the twenty-first century, the Western world had entered the postmodern age, in which the political ideals and ideologies of a hundred years had failed and the freedom of the egocentric individual had become total. The society of the World Wide Web is virtual, that is *impersonal* – this is the postmodern vision.

Our roaming commences at the basics: *What* shall we understand under Christianity? Christianity is often used by the social sciences as a collective concept of values, rules and ethical norms. However, this study will examine Christianity as a religion and less as a concept of the history of ideas. While Christianity's historical role can easily be grasped in the formation of political institutions, philosophies and ethics are

¹ For a captivating theory of civilisation on human adventure, see Elemér Hankiss, *Az emberi kaland* (Budapest: Helikon, 2014).

² János Frivaldszky, *Térmetzetjog* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2001), 56–146, 300; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

³ Rémi Brague, *Curing Mad Truths: Medieval Wisdom for the Modern Age* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

best captured in its *religious* form, otherwise ideology, philosophy, social mission and charity remain. The Christian religion sees God as a superhuman and supernatural intellect that has consciously designed and created the universe, and Man within it.⁴ Human life has a divine origin, meaning and purpose. God comes into contact with man, and the Messiah brought salvation from the awareness of original sin (from suffering itself). He proclaims eternal truth, all this with love and the promise of eternal life. The Christian religion is the ‘eternal prophecy’.⁵ It gave mankind hope, which became *the strongest* community-building belief in Western culture.

Nowadays, a *traditional* outlook on life is intertwined with Christianity, so it is worth briefly covering the approach that looks on Christianity as a *tradition*.⁶ Let us look at Christianity from the beginning, from its origin; that is, we will not examine religion as a historical and social (ethnographic) construct, but in its true depth. In Hamvas’s poetic interpretation, the state of humanity before Christianity was:

Fateless, aimless man, ataraxia, Tao’s man, passivity, waiting neutrality; man cannot go beyond this degree from his own strength. Man has already been created, but the living word has not yet been inhaled. The moment will come when man receives the living word, worthlessness will gain its quality. Nothing becomes something, a nobody becomes someone. The goal is born, the complete and ready man.

According to Hamvas, Christianity as a tradition means the *recovery* of man’s archaic temporal, primordial position. It seeks to turn man towards a normal, universal and absolute human existence, that is, to free him from a broken-down (corrupt) life. Christianity creates an *autonomous and communal human ideal*. Hamvas’s Christianity as a tradition is related to the Hebrew, Greek, Chinese, Iranian and Hindu traditions. Religion may disappear (atheism), but tradition is indestructible; it cannot be lost in time. According to this, Christianity is equal to the tradition before Jesus and cannot disappear in the future. Tradition is always about the fullness of existence, for all of humanity. It is not European, nor Western, not religious but of universal validity. Tradition is *deist*; God is the creator of the universe, passive in the destiny of men. Tradition becomes theism *in religion*, that is, in the active God who shapes the cause of man.

Tradition is about man; religion is about a (loving) relationship and community. Over the past millennium, the Christian religion has proven to be the most effective force for community cohesion and retention. For free individuals, only commonly accepted ties and constraints could and can organise a community. In the last two hundred years, has it been possible to build a strong community without a Christian religion; that is, to organise a social order? Is there still a demand for real communities? What does the present show and what can the future bring for the

⁴ Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Az öt világvallás* (Budapest: Akkord, 2012), 212–320.

⁵ László Ravasz, *Pál Athénban* (Budapest: MTA, 1928).

⁶ Béla Hamvas, *Scientia Sacra II* (Budapest: Medio, 2015).

Christian religion? The main question of the study is what the role of the Christian religion may be in future communities, after a secularised social experiment over the past two hundred years. First it is requisite to examine the roots and more important historical moments of Christianity in order to arrive at the causes of its ascension and weakening. The thread of the story is driven by the ideal of freedom. Christianity, and man within it, can only be understood from the point of view of freedom – the awakening to freedom.

II Man before the Christian religion

It is not known what conception of God human beings who lived and hunted in nature had. The use of symbols (cave paintings and some of the small sculptures, as well as burials from this period) suggests the existence of some kind of world of beliefs in the age of the Upper Palaeolithic in Europe 40–50 thousand years before Christ. Perhaps man considered himself a part of nature, subjecting his destiny to the spirits of nature, like trees and animals. His life was arranged by the shadows of the stars, earth, wind, rain, fire and the shadows of his dead peers. He also experienced freedom as part of nature, that is, as a natural thing. He probably had no special word or indication for freedom, because it was equal to the destiny of nature. Tradition and the tales of the elderly taught him what spirits had created the world and how. Perhaps he was preoccupied with the questions of why he was in the world and why he was going to die. However, the answers were given to him by a thorough knowledge of nature: Nature has an order, and he was a part of that order. Natural man received the experience of existence from nature, in which death was only a transition to another form of existence. We do not know in what spirits our predecessors, living in nature, believed, but he presumably knew that nature provides the source of life and cruelly takes life away. He saw animals as ancestors and creative forces and ‘talked’ to them; he was an animist, meaning that he believed in the world of souls. He also believed in the souls of animals. He fought for survival; not against nature but as part of nature. Civilised man looks back on the millennia spent in a covenant with nature as a primitive religion. Our *Homo sapiens* ancestors lived this way for 100 or maybe 150 thousand years. Their heritage lives on in our genes as the ancient image or archetype of nature’s freedom.⁷

At the beginning of the Holocene era (12 thousand years ago) this world was ended, humans began working the land, having stepped out of the order of natural life. Over some 5–7 thousand years, farming became the basis of community life. Grain growing and animal husbandry provided better chances of survival, but it

⁷ Lajos Szimonidesz, *Primitív és kultúrvallások, iszlám és buddhizmus* (Budapest: Dante, 1931); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: John Murray, 1871); Robin Dunbar, *The Human History* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005); Yuval N Harari, *Sapiens* (New York: Harper, 2015).

came at a heavy price. The loss of natural freedom, frequent struggles with nature, keeping the wild animals away from the farm, begging for rain and a good harvest. He needed *new gods* in order to dominate nature. However, new gods were also needed to maintain the *peace* of communities with increasing population density. With farming, a significant population arose and kinship-based traditions became less and less functional bringing the need for new ways of living in communities. Communities were organised into more complex hierarchies not based on family ties; moreover, hard farming work left *less and less* freedom for man. The lost 'Garden of Eden', the primordial image of Paradise, awakened man's guilt. The 'original sin', by which he denied natural freedom, and Mother Nature became part of the cultures.⁸ The farmer who stepped out of nature had to reorganise his own world, struggle with nature and cope with the burden of a new form of freedom. In addition to the many good things, bad ones appeared; as the Tao says: 'All can know good as good only because there is evil.'⁹ The history of the farmer which began then has continued up until the present day (the *Anthropocene*). Over 10 thousand years, man has increasingly harnessed the energies of nature for his own benefit, populated the earth and lived in increasingly secure material prosperity. Living in ever-larger communities, he had to find the right degree of freedom in the relationship between the individual and the community. However, this was rarely successful because it was easy to take freedom from a man of guilt using the promise of security, cruel gods or force. Communities became *oppressive systems of power*.

However, the phenomenon of freedom does appear at certain moments in written history. In these moments, one seeks the freedom of Paradise Lost, to escape the bondage of guilt and seek the right degree of freedom. Attempts to liberate the human spirit find the opening of freedom for good *in human reason*. Over the millennia the religions of *eternal world law* are created, which seek the way (back) to the order of nature and natural freedom. The Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist religions mark the metaphysical path of human freedom. The universists of Chinese civilisation, the philosophy of Confucianism and Taoism, also see the free man in the midst of the eternal laws of nature.

The awakening of 'Western man' began with the Hellenic world.¹⁰ The basic feeling of the Greek geniuses was that behind things, as their soul, hides the *logos* that

⁸ The book of Moses also spoke of this guilt: 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life . . . and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food' (Genesis 3:17–19). Symbols reveal the way out of nature: The serpent, the creator of nature that has been sacred for millennia, becomes evil and is trampled by man. In guilt, man already denies freedom of choice. Adam says: 'The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.' The woman said: 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate' (1Gen 3:12,13). Original sin is conceived in the denial of freedom. Yet, from this denial arises the idea of freedom, as man enters from Paradise into the world of good and evil, where he must decide using free will.

⁹ Lao Tzu, *Tao-Teh-Ching* (Boston: Nomad, 1996), 6.

¹⁰ This analysis is based on Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926).

gives life to the entire cosmos; one must live in harmony with it. From the empire of Alexander the Great to the Roman Empire, hundreds of religions intermingled, and the 'unknown gods' were also revered and had altars raised to them. The Greeks believed in the gods, but they sought freedom and truth in *human wisdom* and called it philosophy. Man becomes the centre of the world: 'gnothi seauton' (that is, know thyself), exhorted Socrates. The great step towards the awakening of human freedom was taken by Aristotle. He continued the path of his masters; that is, he created concepts. The concept of freedom was born centuries later thanks to Aristotle, as was the system of human thought, that is, the logic. The method of correct thinking, the Aristotelian *Organon*, was a thought so powerful that it laid the foundations (in part) for Christian theology centuries later.¹¹ Socratic philosophy and Aristotle provided a scholarly basis for later Christian thought. In the sixth to fourth centuries before Christ, the healing of Hippocrates, the Sun-centric cosmology of Pythagoras, the biology of Empedocles, and the diverse learning of Democritus, Anaximenes, Thales, Heraclitus, Anaximander and others awakened human wisdom. The god of philosophers does not interfere with man's business. Aristotle's god does nothing, has no will or purpose, but he is the cause and the ultimate goal, the form of forms. This sometimes *deistic*, sometimes *pantheistic* image of god is realised in the view of the Stoics and Epicureans: 'To look at everything with a calm mind', that is, to accept what is. There is little difference between the 'emptiness' (*satori*) of Buddhism and the Hellenic stoic aimless serenity (*ataraxia*). Man awakens; he is wise, and receives the spirit of nature. The man of the religions of world law and the aimless man of Hellenism is 'the passivity, the waiting neutrality'. 'Man has already been created, but the living word has not yet been inhaled.'¹²

The Jewish people remained indifferent to Greek influences; 'these people feel that they are the only one of the peoples of the earth to have made a direct covenant with the Infinite God, the Anonymous.'¹³ The Jewish religion, unlike all earlier and contemporary religions, created a personal relationship between God and man: God makes revelations to man, gives commandments and forms plans. God promises man a Messiah and salvation. The guilt of the original sin, the loss of Paradise, is also a primordial experience for the Jewish people. For them, salvation (that is, the end of the world) is near. This is when Jesus arrives on the stage of world history.¹⁴ Jesus probably did not study Greek philosophy or the religions of world

¹¹ Aristotle, 'Organon', in Aristotle, *Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908).

¹² Hamvas, *Scientia Sacra II*.

¹³ Sándor Márai, *Harminc ezüstpénz* (München: Újváry "Griff", 1983), 9.

¹⁴ The moment of arrival in the vision of Sándor Márai: 'Arcadian landscape, yet Galilee is a restless land. Just as all lands are troubled at a time where Jews live. . . . [E]veryone was waiting for the end of the world here. It was natural for them, an everyday commonplace. . . . [T]he people, this Jewish people driven from exile into slavery, enduring in the land of their fathers, could not expect anything at this time but salvation, the natural condition of which is that the end of the world is here. . . . Jesus knows that his word sounds in the time, he knows that his word will one day be more than the word

laws, but the Mediterranean was steeped in Hellenic and Eastern wisdom. Jesus knew this without learning. From a small sect, Christianity became the only world religion that sees a man as the son of God. Jesus followed the Jewish teachings, but eventually his thoughts led to the liberation of man. Before it, for millennia, religions and philosophies were attempts to liberate man, seeking lost freedom and escape from the bondage of guilt. *Freedom* between man and community, the definition of the human baseline (as Hamvas put it) receives a benchmark with the teachings of Jesus. The moment came with Jesus when ‘man receives the living word, the nothing becomes something, the nobody becomes someone. The goal is born. The complete and ready man’.¹⁵

III The birth of the Christian man

We may wonder how a small Judean sect could become the religion of the Roman world empire in just three centuries and then the world religion that conquered the whole world in one and a half thousand years. The answer, perhaps, is that the teaching of Jesus created the image of the ‘ideal’ religion, dormant in Western man, awakening the ancient image of God waiting in him. By proclaiming the divine origin, meaning, and purpose of life as eternal truth, He gave mankind the strongest community-building faith, mystery, and task – to wait for the end of the world, which gives salvation and eternal life. He gave man a saving thought. In the Old Testament, this freedom cannot be interpreted without God. The term ‘*nefes*’ is used in several senses; it means free desire or longing, but it is also equates to the soul.¹⁶ Man was given freedom by the soul, an integral part of his being. Habakkuk also gives direction to human freedom: ‘The righteous will live for his faithfulness.’¹⁷ Freedom must be used for the good life of serving God. Jesus knew that sin and guilt deprive man of freedom. The original sin that keeps man in sin, and gives him a sinful complex has been built by repressive systems of power. ‘Everyone who sins is a slave to sin’ (John 8:34). One must free oneself from the bondage of guilt and take responsibility for freedom. According to Jesus’s teaching, there is no freedom without redemption from sin and guilt. ‘So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’ (John 8:36). If there is no freedom, one cannot choose. The way of Jesus must be chosen by man, freely and by faith. Jesus awakens in man the search for purpose and reason. It gives a purpose to man: the path of love. ‘I am the way, the truth and the life’ (John 14:6).

of the prophets before him. This is known to the simple Jew, who until the age of thirty was none other than the carpenter’s son in Galilee.’ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hamvas, *Scientia Sacra II*, 88.

¹⁶ Zoltán Tarjányi (ed.), *Erkölcsteológiai tanulmányok. A szabadság* (Budapest: Jel, 2008), 14.

¹⁷ Ibid. 18.

The path of love leads to the truth. Christian freedom and truth are interdependent concepts.¹⁸ ‘What is truth?’, asked Pilates, and man has been repeating the question ever since, and inevitably confronting the narrow limits of human knowledge. The life of Jesus does not collide with the walls of knowledge, but ends in the divine spirit. This path must, however, be chosen. This is man’s freedom, the responsibility of freedom. As Augustine of Hippo formulated it: ‘The one who created you without you will not justify you without you.’¹⁹ You can say no! The apostles of Jesus were free to choose; they were sometimes torn, but in the end they chose discipleship themselves. Jesus demonstrated the responsibility of individual freedom by likening it to entering a narrow or a wide gate (Matthew 7:13–14). He gave freedom to do good, but also to do evil. Why did we get freedom from God to do evil? Augustine’s answer was that without it, freedom for good could not exist.²⁰ It makes sense to refrain from evil. We also received the ability to do evil from God. We often see the good, yet we choose the bad.

Two thousand years ago in Galilee, Jesus, as the prophet of a crumbling nation, conveyed a teaching to his own nation that, over time, provided every national community with a secure means of community organisation. The cult of the Roman emperor, an eternal divine sovereignty as the head of all strength and power, also gave a strong community in the empire. In contrast, Jesus brought to the surface the deepest and most oppressed human question – the *meaning and purpose* of human life. He gave an answer that highlights the human essence in his time and is timelessly valid anywhere and in any relationship between peoples and people. In the Hellenic world and the Roman Empire, in the midst of more than half a millennium of decadence and chaotic diversity, there was a longing in man for the certainty, revelation and redemption that the teaching of Jesus gave. He liberated man and gave him new and fresh strength and tools for community building. That is why a skinny Jewish man, Paul, was able to convert thousands in chaotic ports and markets.

The teaching of the Gospels has provided one of the strongest messages in history about the need to balance freedom in the relationship between the individual and the community. ‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you’ (Matthew 7:12). The Bible tells us that both the community and the individual are important. All of this seems self-evident when viewed from today, but neither was like that in the first centuries of Christianity. The individual was graded by the community, according to different classes and castes, as something that was more important than the individual himself. The community was ruled by ruling elites. Neither the individual, nor the community, collectively or separately, were given responsibility for freedom and the right to

¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 31–34.

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, *Sermones*, 169, 11.13.

²⁰ Tarjányi, *Tanulmányok*, 55.

liberty. However, the power of this teaching began to weaken after the passage of one and a half thousand years.

IV The weakening of Christianity, the renaissance of deism

Was the natural image of God (deism) and the image of man in the Hellenic world a thesis of Western culture to which Christianity arrived as an antithesis? Or, conversely, did Christianity become a thesis and then the mediaeval renaissance and science came as its antithesis? We see intertwined ghosts and passions of the age rather than its main or secondary currents. But above all, we need to see the geniuses who shape the spirit of the age. In history, the change of the spirit of the age has been shaped by the thought systems of geniuses. It was not the spirit of the age that created the genius, but vice versa. The passion for the era was produced by the crowd (Hamvas). In the religions of natural and 'eternal world law' (Shinto, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Chinese universalism) and in the systems of philosophy, in man's sense of natural freedom, attained through intellect and insight, he was looking for a way to *return* via discernment.

Deism was already a powerful force in the first centuries of the spread of Christianity – belief in a God, not the Christian one. The essence of deism is to believe in a divine supremacy that created the world along with its natural laws. God is present, but he does not dominate or influence the 'development' of the world, nor does he interfere in the affairs of man. The divine transcendent is nature itself, its revelation is nature itself. It can be observed in eternal forms of existence, perceived with meaning and the heart. The passive god of Hellenism and Aristotle and the deism of the Stoics lay dormant in the human consciousness, which *Medieval art* awakened (Renaissance) in a moment. Although the Christian faith offered answers to eternal truth, in addition to faith (the lost Paradise, that is), the attraction of nature, knowledge, the need to understand and curiosity were also at work in man. Thus, the scientific geniuses of the age were born.

The first of them was by Roger Bacon (thirteenth century), who taught the Franciscan orders science. In the *Opus Majus* he lashed out at blind faith in false authority, custom, prejudice and ignorance.²¹ He placed science on an equal footing with theology, above all mathematics and optics. The surge of knowledge and learning was triggered by the discovery of printing, with millions of books printed in the second half of the fifteenth century. Another driving force of collective learning was the intoxication of exploring new worlds, starting with the American continent. Deism and the Renaissance began to sprout here and then blossomed with the experiments of Leonardo da Vinci, with the astronomical discoveries of Nicolaus Copernicus (sixteenth century), Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler

²¹ Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus* (Freiburg: Herder, 2008).

(seventeenth century), and the biology, medicine and chemistry of William Harvey, Andreas Vesalius and Paracelsus – who rewrote the dogmas of a thousand years of Hippocrates and Galen. They were influenced by the scientific knowledge of the universe, a creative force reminiscent of the art of Hellenism, a romantic recollection of Greek philosophy, with a focus on the human. They were all believers, like everyone else at the time. The God of deism *exists*, but he *does not live*, and this took them further and further away from the image of the god of Christianity. All this went hand in hand with the rejection of Christian ecclesiastical authority, often starting from the ecclesiastical orders.²²

The milestone was announced by Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton.²³ Bacon was religious, but his faith in God tended to deism.²⁴ It was philosophy which he expected primarily from the revolution of knowledge, and science only secondarily. He saw not only power in philosophical knowledge ('Knowledge is power') but a new foundation of human freedom. Contrary to the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, he considered intellect and the will to be one. According to Bacon, human reason must be freed from the bondage of a millennium of nebulae (idols), that is, the laws of nature must be found and obeyed. 'We cannot command nature except by obeying her'; that is, we must watch, experience and prove it. Two thousand years after Aristotle's *Organon*, he created the *New Organon* (1620), the second 'bible' of science. The pillars of this were raised only six decades later: Newton published his *Principles*,²⁵ and Baruch Spinoza published his *Ethics* (1677). The spirit of Paradise lost, Mother Nature, came to life; the law of nature and the will of God became *one*. According to Spinoza, God is the order of existence and man is only a form in the 'eternal relation of things' (*sub specie aeternitatis*), in the world of substances. 'All things are in God and move in God.'²⁶

Science studies the order of nature, and in this order the freedom of man begins to turn into an *illusion*. As Spinoza put it: Man is as free as a discarded stone thinks

²² The clergy became a repressive and ostentatious system of power. In Franco Zeffirelli's film classic (*Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, 1972) Saint Francis (Francesco) and his followers go to the Pope, who says: 'Once upon a time, I thought like you, but over time, my enthusiasm waned because the responsibility of governing the church took its place. . . . Power and wealth shall invade us, and ye shall be ashamed of your poverty. . . . Francesco, go in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, proclaim the truth everywhere.'

²³ The analysis relies on Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*.

²⁴ 'I had rather believe all the fables in the Legend, and the Talmud and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind. And therefore God never wrought miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it. It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion.' Francis Bacon, *Essays* (London: Samuel Mearne, Henry Herringman, 1680), 56.

²⁵ Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (London, Royal Society, 1686).

²⁶ Benedict de Spinoza, 'Letter 21 (73)', in Benedict de Spinoza, *Chief Works*. Transl. by Robert HM Elwes (London: George Bell and Sons, 1901), vol 2, 211.

it controls its own trajectory.²⁷ Spinoza's God gives neither good nor bad direction to human action. Man can thus have an aspiration, 'the pursuit of understanding'. It is the first and only foundation of virtue that grants him freedom, 'the action of discernment'. To do so is to recognise and rid ourselves of the individualism of instincts, and at the same time to recognise the forms of eternity in our existence.²⁸ Spinoza laid the foundations of *scientific determinism*, that is, the determination of the will. This would become the *axiom of modernity*, and at the same time the basis of liberation for modern psychology by the 'awareness' of determinism.²⁹

At the dawn of our era (eighteenth century) came the 'freest man' of Europe, the eternally exiled Voltaire. He preached with much greater impact than his predecessors on the liberation of the human spirit. '[D]estroy the insipid declamations, the miserable sophistries, the lying history, . . . the absurdities without number; do not let those who have sense be subjected to those who have none!'³⁰ Superstition and ignorance annoyed him: 'A fanaticism composed of superstition and ignorance has been the sickness of all the centuries.'³¹ He idealised freedom: 'To be free is to be subject to nothing but the laws',³² or 'By what right could a being created free force another to think like himself?'³³ He fought against church tyranny and hypocrisy, but saw God as a useful principle for explaining the world, in the same way as the laws of physics could. 'If it is very presumptuous to divine what He is, and why He has made everything that exists, so it seems to me very presumptuous to deny that He exists.'³⁴ He also considered religion necessary,³⁵ yet he replaced divine certainty with the basic position of doubt and the search for meaning. 'Doubt is not a very agreeable state, but certainty is a ridiculous one', he opined.³⁶

The religious world, which sought to break out of religious wars, ecclesiastical arbitrariness and the mire of theology, sought a religion that could be built on reason (rationalism) and natural laws (pantheism). The deism of Jean Bodin and Bacon was a renaissance of the pre-Christian worship of nature. The existence of God, moral

²⁷ '[W]e are tossed about by external causes in many ways, and like waves driven by contrary winds, we waver and are unconscious of the issue and our fate.' Quoting Spinoza, Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, 200.

²⁸ Ibid. 190–198.

²⁹ Recognition of determinism as a way of awakening to consciousness; two basic works, Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London: Hutchinson, 1967); Erich Fromm, Daisetz T Suzuki and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper, 1960).

³⁰ Quoting Voltaire, Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, 259.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. 268.

³³ Ibid. 259.

³⁴ Ibid. 262.

³⁵ '[I]f there is a hamlet, to be good it must have a religion.' Ibid. 264. He was a theist; as he wrote, a man firmly persuaded of the existence of a supreme being as good as he is powerful, who has formed all things.' Ibid. 265.

³⁶ Ibid. 266.

responsibility, freedom and the soul as an eternal law remain, but God does not create a personal relationship with man, even though he is present in every element of existence. In deism, God *creates* but does *not act*, and theology is replaced by Stoic philosophy, which we see reborn in the thoughts of Voltaire, Denis Diderot, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Auguste Comte, Kant, Gotthold E Lessing or Benjamin Franklin. While deism rejected theology and scholastic dogmas, it revered the moral teachings of Jesus. Jesus's teachings on freedom about the right degree of freedom between man and community, about the path of love and the divine intellect, were, at least, allowed to remain in the temples.

The omnipotence of human reason, the beauty of doubt and the power of science were cemented by the last genius of the eighteenth century. A tiny Prussian, a grey and boring professor from Königsberg who was misunderstood by almost everyone; that's why they named their dog Immanuel Kant after him. The philosophy and science of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were based on the thinking of Kant. For him, Eastern philosophy touches on Western thinking.³⁷ According to his philosophy, God cannot be *proved* by reason, God is the (*a priori*) law living in us. The teachings of Jesus were also confirmed in Kant's theorems. The idea of Jesus's freedom concerns the moral law living in man, and Kant also idealised this community. Although the dogmas of theology and the ideals based on them are demolished in Kant's works, personal faith and religion were exalted. According to Heinrich Heine, Kant 'killed God'. In fact, Kant saved God, the true religion and the teachings of Jesus – although not for the church, but for philosophy.

Voltaire and Kant considered atheists re-liberated and regarded the teachings of Jesus profaned in their thought as an inner commandment. The 'new Christianity' of the era was deism, which laid the foundations for the further triumph of science and of the ideal of individual choice (the liberal paradigm). The deism and pantheism of the philosophers represented the basis of *human rights*, an idea which was born in the late eighteenth century. This philosophy of religion laid the foundations for the European revolutions, declarations of fundamental rights and the first constitutions,

³⁷ Absolute freedom was fulfilled by Kant. He said that what man and his great philosophers and scientists had thought and believed to be reality so far was merely the appearance of perception. The exalted human intellect is deceptive; that which we consider to be proved is mere assumption. Our intellect moves within the limits of sensual perception. This is true for freedom, for God, for good and evil alike. This scepticism is also true for science until we come to 'pure' reason. We do not know the absolute truth through our senses, only without sensual experience. We must reveal the immanent, *a priori* moral principles living in our inner self, born with us, which are categorical laws, imperatives like mathematics. Pure reason is also practical reason. Freedom is a categorical imperative that we cannot prove with theoretical reason, but in the moment of crisis we feel the unconditional command of freedom living within us. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

the fruits of the *Enlightenment*. The human spirit, the laws of nature, and the search for truth became components of the evolving moral philosophy of freedom. The social influence of the Christian religion weakened; *the cult of human dignity and perfection* was unstoppable.

V The phenomenon of Christian freedom

The freedom to be found in the teachings of Jesus is a hiding place that appears only fleetingly in history. In these teachings man found the lost paradisiacal freedom, escaped the bondage of guilt, and sought the right degree of freedom in relation to the individual and the community. This aspiration also appeared in the human rights declarations of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The tragedy of the search for freedom was memorialised in the grand inquisitor scene in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, which is an eternal symbol of the fact that the preacher of freedom is always crucified.³⁸ Original sin is always repeated, from the expulsion from Paradise to the Crucifixion of the Saviour, right through to the burning at the stake of martyrs and scientists. What explains this? Do we not allow the promoter of freedom to do truth and good to 'deprive' us of our freedom to commit evil? Do we cling to our freedom out of sin and ignorance? Do we insist that we remain free to give up our freedom only to give it to the great inquisitors who promise security? Do we like to live in the bondage of our little addictions, to lock ourselves in the pockets of our ego, to live in ignorance and superficiality, to 'spin', that is, to have fun on the bars from here?

In the lair of freedom, the clear message of Jesus's teachings still sparkled, even in the nineteenth century with the exile of religion. Jesus also spoke when something 'ended' in the 'human landscape' and something new began (Sándor Márai). New worlds were built; the Constitution of the United States of America (1787) and the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights (1789) appeared. There were the revelations of the *ideal benchmark* of freedom between the sovereign national

³⁸ In Dostoevsky's novel, Jesus Christ arrives in sixteenth-century Seville, and is imprisoned as a heretic by the Grand Inquisitor. Beaten in handcuffs, the Saviour listens silently to the monologue of the Grand Inquisitor, the epitome of earthly power. 'Thou wouldst go into the world, and art going with empty hands, with some promise of freedom which men in their simplicity and their natural unruliness cannot even understand, which they fear and dread – for nothing has ever been more insupportable for a man and a human society than freedom. . . . So long as man remains free he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find some one to worship. But man seeks to worship what is established beyond dispute, so that all men would agree at once to worship it. For these pitiful creatures are concerned not only to find what one or the other can worship, but to find something that all would believe in and worship; what is essential is that all may be together in it. This craving for community of worship is the chief misery of every man individually and of all humanity from the beginning of time.' Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Transl. by Constance Garnett (New York: Lowell), 278–279.

community and sovereign man. The *ideal of freedom* and a *new ideal of community* met in humanism. The tradition of humanism is often associated with the Christian religion.³⁹ According to this view, humanism and human rights are based on the idea of Christianity, which has given the human soul an inalienable dignity. From this arises the equal dignity and freedom of man – the secular doctrine of equality. Within Christianity, the Reformation initiated a turn towards humanism with a critique of the authority of the institutions of ecclesiastical and temporal power.

The individualism awakened by the Renaissance and science received a decisive impetus in the Reformation, and a personal faith gave dignity to the individual: It was able to resist tyranny.⁴⁰ In my opinion, Christianity is no more humanistic than the history of philosophy from Socrates to Kant, the art of the Renaissance, the philosophy of science of Francis Bacon or the life of Voltaire. The eighteenth and nineteenth century ideal of freedom is built on the preceding three hundred years of *deist, pantheist and rationalist philosophy* just as much as it is *on Christianity*. Since it confronted Christian ecclesiastical authority, the new ideal of freedom emerged on a *secular*, that is, on a non-religious basis. The change of era means that European culture, after the era of the divine age and the heroic rebellion, arrived at the era of *people-centredness* (Arnold Toynbee).⁴¹ On the new foundation of modernity and human rights, the long nineteenth century saw the rise of the great paradigm of *liberalism* and the ideal of *natural law*, while the short twentieth century spawned the *positivism* of public law and international law. The new ideals solidified *into a totem* and moved on towards their self-destructive destiny.⁴² The scepticism of science, meanwhile, subtly mocked the eternal truths of the Christian religion. The revolution of industry and money sought new community organising *idols*, which became a fatal and devastating *passion for age* over time. The Christian religion fell into decline. The concealed sanctuary of Christian freedom disappeared under the new superstructures.

The European corpus of Christianity began to disintegrate, starting from the Reformation, with the formation of *national languages* and *national cultures* and the aspiration of 'national freedom' as a new ideal. Migration begins in Europe as a result of industrialisation (*Gemeinschaft* turns into *Gesellschaft*). A migrant worker separated from his small community must find a common identity and language in

³⁹ Oskar Halecki, *The Millennium of Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963).

⁴⁰ István Bibó analyses why it would not have been possible to limit the exercise of political power to moral limits without the theology of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas. The Christian ideal is given a pattern, the tyrannus may be judged; this inspires the movement of group freedoms (*libertas*) as privileges and rights, from which individual rights develop. István Bibó, *Az állambatalmak elválasztása* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2011), 311–313.

⁴¹ János Gyurgyák, *Európa alkonya?* (Budapest: Osiris, 2018), 94–102, referenced by Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934–1961).

⁴² András Zs Varga, *Eszményből bálvány?* (Budapest: Századvég, 2015).

the cities, and this will be the driving force of the national culture.⁴³ While Europe is being fragmented by national forces and revolutions, Christianity continues to pass down the idea of *universality* into legal systems ('all men are created equal'). The exclusionary instinct, entwined with *national identity*, however, had already undermined the idea of the *universality of human rights* at its birth. By the end of the twentieth century, the development of human rights had become detached from the Christian ideal of community. The social organising and value-preserving potential of Christianity also continued to weaken. The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were an era of great social and political attempts at secularisation.

VI An attempt at secularisation

From the nineteenth century onwards, the Christian religion weakened in Europe and North America, and later in large areas of South America, to varying degrees, as a *community-building force*; religion became a private matter. The new ideals were the rational and moral laws and the human freedoms based on them, with freedom of speech at their forefront;⁴⁴ they formed the new ethos of community building. Without the Christian God and religion, for one and a half thousand years no one had built a strong community (*societas perfecta*) in Europe. Exiting the common belief system, the individual became agnostic and sceptical, became stoic, and eventually bargained away his freedom to Dostoevsky's grand inquisitor in exchange for security. Can you find better answers than Christianity to the purpose and meaning of the life of the human community? Science raised doubts. This marked the beginning of the attempt at secularisation in the nineteenth century.

While the community sought new common ideals, politics offered new legitimising ideas. The spells of *money*, *wealth* and *political ideologies* also tried to crowd the Christian mystery out of the lives of the community and the individual. *New philosophies and human rights* became the basis of the new secularised morality. The national constitutions, the social contract, popular sovereignty, the will of the people and the choice of the individual and the political rights based on it became the new community-building and legitimising institutions. The free choice of the individual created political power (liberalism), a way of life (individualism) and an economy (capitalism). This *secular ideological trilogy*, based on *individual freedom*, replaced the *Holy Trinity*. The peoples of Europe fall under the spell of the carnival of dogmatic worldviews and the Magic Mountain (Thomas Mann). In previous centuries, the search for lasting bonds of common culture, and for harmony steered communities toward Christianity. In contrast, new ideologies seek the political and economic fulfilment of individual freedom. Science and its philosophies have awakened the

⁴³ Francis Fukuyama, *Identity* (New York: Picador, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 59–74.

⁴⁴ András Koltay, *Tíz tanulmány a szólásszabadságról* (Budapest: Wolters Kluwer, 2018), 9–14.

‘Faustian’ spirit of Western culture: An eternally seeking, doubting, power-minded, purposeful, intolerant and hedonistic spirit.⁴⁵

The alliance of both capitalism and science seeks the secret of development in the *material*, and explains human life by material phenomena. *Materialism* persecutes the transcendent and spiritual responses of religion. The origin of moral norms is sought in man, in his *a priori* imperatives (Kant). The process of disunion begins: Philosophy and law *humanise*, seeking the meaning in life, while science *dehumanises*, that is, *naturalises*. The quest for meaning of life is conquered by *determinism*, a science that questions free will. The naturalism of biology (biochemistry) and psychology, and then psychoanalysis, mechanise (rationalise) man and life, or to use another word, demystify them.⁴⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin’s theory of *evolution* had also embarked on its journey of conquest (1859).⁴⁷ According to this hypothesis, human life has no purpose and meaning. We are the products of natural selection, adaptive mutations; there are strange living things on our family trees, and we are related to eukaryotes and even prokaryotes. There is no creation and we are not the crowning achievement of creation. It would render us mere groups of living beings, struggling to survive and reproduce, sometimes battling with microorganisms and viruses. The science of anthropology forms the superstructure. Man becomes subject to ‘naked’ instinct; Sigmund Freud claimed to be motivated by sexuality, Friedrich Nietzsche by a will to power. The world is the will of the individual (Arthur Schopenhauer), that is, ultimately Nothing.⁴⁸ A propensity for Romantic *pessimism* (spleen) and *nihilism* begins to dominate the thinking of the Western world. Science continues to build up the Newtonian system, and everything can be explained by mathematics and the laws of the four forces (gravity, electromagnetism, strong and weak bonding). However, one is increasingly missing from the theory of *universality*: God.

The centuries-old scaffolding of Christianity is strained but still stands. Thoughts of philosophy continue to revolve around God: Streams of deism, pantheism, agnosticism, relativism and atheism collide and extinguish each other. New ideological forces are emerging: atheistic socialism, Marxism and communism.

⁴⁵ The Faustian spirit of the West, the Faustian man and the symbolism of autumn are the basic ideas of Oswald Spengler’s work, *The Decline of the West* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1926).

⁴⁶ According to Christian thought, ‘it is not possible to understand the spirit from nature, but nature can be understood from the spirit. . . . The self-sustaining tendency of man as a natural being does not coincide with the line of development of man as a spiritual being. . . . [T]he nature is contrary to the requirements of superiority to it.’ László Ravasz, *Kicsoda az ember?* (Budapest: BRKIE, 1918), 39–44.

⁴⁷ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859).

⁴⁸ The last sentence of the first volume: ‘[F]or those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this world of ours which is so very real with all its suns and galaxies is – nothing.’ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*. Ed. and transl. by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 439.

New socialist elites are conquering new social ideas, national socialism, fascism and Soviet collectivism. Science reinforces the doubts besieging man with new theories. According to quantum physics, the physical laws of our world do not work in the world of atoms; that is, there is no absolute status. The theory of relativity is born, according to which we ripple in the infinite fabric of space–time. The darkness around man is deepening and billions of galaxies are discovered besides our own (1923, discovery of Edwin Hubble).

Barely a hundred years after the beginning of the attempt at secularisation, by the twentieth century, the literature of the *decline of the West* emerges: declinism, the ideology of the world crisis, the art of decadence.⁴⁹ At the end of the Great War, Oswald Spengler announced the *Decline of the West* (1918), and the post-World War II era is shaped by the work of Eliot on the decline of *culture*.⁵⁰ Science, which had become increasingly ideologically charged (*scientificism*), still could not give meaning to human life and human freedom, only deepening the doubts. Agnostic and atheist Europe sought ideals in both Eastern cultures and Islam. This corrupt atheist world is punished by Mikhail Bulgakov in his novel *The Master and Margarita*; Woland is the antihero of the Christian world. The archetype and communal ethos of the Christian religion had become a subconscious image, an archetype re-mystified. World War II pushed Western culture into moral misery. The experience suggests that after the extermination or weakening of the Christian tradition, the ‘moral’ dictatorship of a power elite always builds a community myth. In the end, these ideologies always crippled the community and failed. In Europe, worldviews and ideas are, in fact, a history of delusions (Hamvas). The ideologies summoned up by secularisation are the Faustian antitheses of Christianity. According to Hegelian dialectics, history combines thesis and antithesis in synthesis. However, the synthesis became an increasingly distant prospect: World War II is followed by half a century of the Cold War of two ideologies.

Entering the twenty-first century, the man of Western culture is beginning to turn away from failed ideological experiments. *Liberalism* and *individualism* have also turned into a rigid ideology, a totem, and strike one as less and less credible as a social ideal, becoming instead a servant of consumer and political culture. The fallen paradigms make the spirituality of the *national community* seem to be a suspicious, bad-faith ideology. However, communities are beginning to rediscover their *national culture*, based on national language and traditions, and

⁴⁹ Arthur Hermann, *The Idea of Decline in Western History* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Béla Hamvas, *A világválság* (Budapest: Magvető, 1983).

⁵⁰ Thomas S Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. Ed. by Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Culture is something that ‘makes life worth living’, and that has an unbroken bond with religion. Culture is self-limiting in the community, just as religion sets common boundaries.

national identity as a community-building force. The historical trap of nationalism represents a real danger if the collective instincts of national arrogance, exclusion or ethnic hostility awaken. The ancient basic feeling is still the fear that, along with disillusionment, flows into the internet's ocean of communication and gives birth to the postmodern age. The postmodern type of man is a man of the crowd, indifferent to social ideologies, politics and worldviews, an egocentric individual. In contrast to the postmodern thesis, (national) traditionality is an antithesis that seeks 'natural' community roots, including the Christian religion. Christian denominations in former communist countries and Orthodox Christianity in Russia are gaining strength. In the United States, secularisation, which separates religion and political life, is increasingly a mere constitutional-public law theorem. In the United States, the Christian religiosity (of the vast majority) of society is strong, and for two hundred years, Christianity has been, and still is, the most important idea and ideal for the diverse immigrant community that makes up the United States.⁵¹

As the foundations of secularisation are weakening, so the institution of human rights has also rusted. Even the theory of human rights, rooted in natural law, expresses a theorem that has not changed in the last two hundred years: Legal norms and their dogmatics are in fact 'legal forms', the content of which is determined by the culture (nature) of a particular people or country. Europe and North America at the end of the eighteenth century were still influenced by a culture based on the Christian religion in a relatively uniform order. If a European or international court had existed at the time, a uniform conception of law between countries and peoples, resting on the cultural foundations of the Christian religion would have been accepted relatively easily. Since then, secularisation has driven national cultures apart through a kind of centrifugal force. *Culturally dependent diversity* and the derogation of human rights are increasing. This does not necessarily imply cultural differences between countries in Europe, but rather the *difference* between a Christian or non-Christian approach.

Will the experiment of a secularised society fail in the coming decades? Are neutral societies losing their viability? What could the twenty-first century 'synthesis' look like, that follows the thesis of Christianity and the antithesis of secularisation? What are the signs that the communities of Western culture, guided in part by a group survival instinct, are finding a modern or postmodern form of the Christian religion? Nearly five hundred years ago, secularisation began with a conflict between 'lame' science, opposing religion, and 'blind' Christianity, attacking science. The answer is perhaps in Einstein's metaphor; that is, we need to assess the status of science.

⁵¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Bantam, 2006), 43–46. He evaluates how difficult it is to cope in American society as an atheist.

VII How far has 'lame' science come?

The scholars who initiated secularisation (from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries), although Christian, held deist or pantheistic ideas of God. Darwin,⁵² Lord Kelvin (William Thomson), Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell were religious, but from Voltaire through Einstein to Stephen Hawking, God is present at the end of the scientific theories, though it is more a form of poetic naturalism (the creator of the laws of nature) and not a belief in a supernatural intelligence or the afterlife of the soul. The God of Spinoza is synonymous with the laws governing the operation of Nature or the Universe; in the words of Einstein: 'I do not believe in a personal God. . . . If something is in me which can be called religious then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it.'⁵³

Some describe God as a 'mathematician', some as a 'biologist'.⁵⁴ In their deism, God is the source of the natural, mathematical, and even moral laws that govern the universe. The greats of science, then, usually arrived at a belief in a higher intelligence that created the world. Many scientists 'believe in faith', and quantum physics is looking for the 'divine particle'. However, scientific deism could not weaken the power of science, especially the agnosticism (the expression of Thomas Huxley) and atheism of neo-Darwinian views.⁵⁵ Science, to paraphrase Einstein, has always remained somewhat lame. The basis of secularisation is the hope that science can provide human communities with answers to the origin, meaning and purpose of life that *will be better* than the teachings of the Christian religion. It was a hope that the answers of science would furnish us with new truths, on which social communities would be strong, moral and prosperous. The road was a sceptical, agnostic or atheistic search for truth that shook off religious authority and its dogmas. In response, religion has also created its own anti-evolutionary 'science of creation' – the teachings of *creationism and intelligent design*.⁵⁶ Science must, then, also undertake, according to Richard Dawkins, to make a statement about the likelihood of a hypothesis of God: Science *cannot be agnostic*, only *atheist*: 'The presence or absence of a creative super-intelligence is unequivocally a scientific question.'⁵⁷

Science, then, is sometimes lame, it sometimes limps, and sometimes its practitioners recognise its limitations and turn to God. The laws of entropy, evolution

⁵² In the last years of his life, Darwin wrote to John Fordyce in a letter (1879): 'In my most extreme fluctuations I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. I think that generally (and more and more so as I grow older) but not always, that an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind.' Charles Darwin, *To John Fordyce* (7 May 1879).

⁵³ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 15.

⁵⁴ Francis S Collins, *The Language of God* (New York: Free Press, 2006). Collins was the leader of the Human Genome project in the USA.

⁵⁵ James Haught, *2000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with the Courage to Doubt* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus, 1996).

⁵⁶ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1986).

⁵⁷ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 58–59.

and information became the three pillars of scientific doubt that destroy tradition. Science has come a long way, on the issues of the human genome, the map of the universe, particle physics, the physics of black holes and many other questions in nature. Nevertheless, science is not able to reproduce the origin of life biologically, and it sees life only as a ‘consequence of a peculiarity and structure of matter’.⁵⁸ Science derives biological evolution from chemical evolution, examining only life phenomena, but has no answer to *the meaning of life and its purpose*. Science has also become guilty of mass destruction, of wars, overpopulation, mass production, destroying nature and bioethical risks.

The centuries-old tragedy of the struggle between science and religion is beginning to be recognised by both camps. Science recognises that cognition is constrained; it cannot provide reassuring answers to the eternal questions of the human soul and uncertainty. Man cannot build a lasting and strong community without a common religion; that is, it takes faith to provide the answers to the dangers around him and to the tormenting questions of life (Why do I live?). Faith that gives transcendent answers must shine in the dim corners of human knowledge and the soul. *Religion* recognises the power of knowledge and the importance of seeking the truth of the intellect, in addition to faith. In the 1950s, Pope Pius XII called evolution an explainable scientific approach to human development, and this was repeated by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1996. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that scientific theories that explain the origins and development of people and the world are not at odds with religion, but leave many questions unanswered. At a meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences maintained by the Holy See in 2014, Pope Francis stated that scientific explanations for the origin of the world did not preclude God’s role in creation. The differences between the scientific conception based on the theory of evolution and the Christian religion seem less and less related to the conflict between reason and irrational faith: Both are equally ranked, faith or hypothesis (in the language of science). Evolutionary theory is also ultimately based on faith, as it has no explanation for either the beginning of biological life or the purpose of biological complexity. Scientists like Francis Collins or even brain researcher Tamás Freund argue for Faith, when reaching the limits of complexity and cognition.⁵⁹ Ultimately, science also becomes a matter of *faith*. This leads to the realisation that man needs religion and science alike. The desire to believe and the desire to know are not mutually exclusive. The lame (science) and the blind (religion) can heal their afflictions together.

The lesson of the last two hundred years is also that, just as secularised ideals of freedom or political ideologies were not able to, neither can science become a *community building* and *community retention force*. Religious tradition as a community-building force and the primordial image of the community cannot be replaced forever. Transcendent divine truths, whether combined with pantheistic or universal

⁵⁸ Albert Szent-Györgyi, *Az örült majom* (Budapest: MKLK, 2014), 23.

⁵⁹ Collins, *The Language of God*, 18.

philosophy, offer man a refuge of community, of common faith, in the solitude of individual freedom, in the indifference of society and in the savagery of nature. After two hundred years of desperate searching for a road, can the rebirth of the Christian religion be the way out of the crisis of Western man? Perhaps, but from what crisis? And what kind of Christianity?

VIII The decline of the post-Christian West, or Christian society?

The crisis philosophy and crisis literature of the last century are products of the 'emptiness' and moral misery experienced in the place of Christian religious communities.⁶⁰ World wars and genocides are demonstrations of the failure of fallen political ideologies (fascism, nationalism and communism). Nor can science help the human soul and the ethos of community in existential and ontological darkness, burdening it instead with additional doubts. Nature is deaf, the cosmos is brittle and empty, we are just developed animals, and there is no eternal life waiting for us. This is what human science has been able to come up with. 'God is dead. . . . And we have killed him'⁶¹ – Nietzsche put it this way that ideologies built in place of deism lead to a world of nothingness, without any value. Nietzsche also held Christianity responsible for the death of deism, but saw the teachings of Jesus as a guide. However, the natural god of deism, although not 'dead', was hardly a suitable ideal for giving man a community-building value and strength.

According to the philosophy of history of Spengler, the emblematic harbinger of the crisis, the decline and fate of Western culture is inevitable. Thriving s are religious, while declining civilisations are non-religious. The agony of the Faustian spirit of Western culture was brought about by the will to power, the constant longing, the pursuit for new businesses and the constant 'struggle'.⁶² The decline began with the secularisation of the nineteenth century, with the triumph of the unreligious man of the crowd, the rule of money and the cult of unlimited freedom. The West is being led to its doom by the philosophies of political ideologies, materialism, the relativism of science, scepticism and pessimism. According to Spengler's vision, by the twenty-first century, the nations of Western culture will begin to disintegrate and become shapeless cosmopolitan masses, in response to which politics will become despotic. Giambattista Vico, one of Spengler's sources of inspiration, distinguished three stages in the history of nations and cultures, the divine (Christianity), the heroic (revolution, ideologies, and science) and finally the human stage.⁶³

⁶⁰ Hamvas, *A világválság*; Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now* (New York: Viking, 2018), pt I, ch. 3.

⁶¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *A Gay Science*. Ed. by Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 120.

⁶² Gyurgyák analyses Spengler's philosophy, see Gyurgyák, *Európa alkonya?*, 71–80.

⁶³ Giambattista Vico, *The New Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).

According to the philosophies of the crisis, in the postmodern Western world, the great community-forming worldviews will ultimately fail. The total diversity of individuals, with their neutral, virtual communities will become an ideal. Transcendent religion (Christianity) is no longer able to recreate true communities. In the post-Christian world, the influx of Islamic and atheist migration will also devour the remnants of Western tradition. Virtual communities on the World Wide Web do not need common ideals. Moreover, the common questions of existence do not preoccupy a person floating in the intoxication of endless strings of relationships and an infinite world of information. Postmodernity is also destroying the last forces of religion. Science does not provide ideals either; it escapes the life phenomena of the microworld and the universe. The last effort of politics is to rebuild communities with a *conservative turn* – the ideology of national identity, the revival of national traditions.

The big question is, can there be a real reversal of the decline; that is, is there still a mass demand for the answers of transcendent religion? By shaping Vico's civilisation life cycles into circular form, can it happen that after the divine, heroic and human phase, the circle continues with another cycle of divine civilisation? What can happen at the gridlock of today's civilisation? Hellenism, the peoples of the Roman Empire, and the Jewish people two thousand years ago were at a similarly critical historical moment. Jesus was born in the age of decadence and of the wait for the end of the world. With Christianity, the divine phase of pre-modern Western culture, the liberation of man, the gospel of freedom, began. Is there still an opportunity in human freedom today to avoid doom, according to the Spenglerian logic of history? Toynbee believes that we are in a cycle of decline, but that the historical power of higher religion should not be underestimated. However, he saw the source of the turnaround not in the renaissance of the Christian religion but in a new world civilisation.⁶⁴

To begin to answer these questions, it is important to note that, in the European Union, 71.6 per cent of the population profess to belong to a Christian denomination (2015), this figure was 69.6 per cent in 2018 (Eurobarometer), 72 per cent in the United States of America (Gallup, 2017), 67.3 per cent in Canada, and nearly 75 per cent in Russia (World Atlas). In Hungary, 74.6 per cent (2015, Eurobarometer) claim to belong to a Christian denomination. According to some of the historians quoted above (for example, Oskar Halecki, Toynbee or Spengler), the foundation of a civilisation has always been fundamentally religious. The religious tradition of the West is Christianity and Hellenism, the Renaissance and, in part, the pantheistic deism pursued by science. For one and a half thousand years, the *Corpus Christianum* was the binding force of the peoples of Europe, and even an indispensable part of Western culture.⁶⁵ If the transcendent beliefs of Christian teaching do not serve to organise the community then Western culture may indeed disappear. Could it be that two centuries of secularisation and science were merely a detour from the spiritual mainstream of the Christian religion?

⁶⁴ See Gyurgyák, *Európa alkonya?*, 97.

⁶⁵ Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilisations* (London: Penguin, 1995).

In replying to this, *scientific hypotheses* can also help. At the individual level, the natural selection laws of evolution hardly work in solidarity or in social societies. However, the group-level evolutionary struggle, that is, the struggle for survival between communities, ethnicities and nations (group selection), is fierce. This is shown today by the political war and urge for national defence sparked by mass migration. Throughout history, in the group selection struggle, the survival of a people has largely depended on the communal power of religion. Will these national and community instincts be revived? Do they consider the Christian religion a viable strategy for community building and self-defence? From politics to small communities, many countries are already following this path. In these countries, the community-building ideologies of the secularised social experiment are turning to dust.

The secular foundations of the Enlightenment, such as human rights, the rule of law, liberalism and even liberal democracy, are slowly coming into conflict with the values of Christianity and national tradition. The secular products of liberalism find no breeding ground in policies based on national identity and tradition, in Christianity, or in the postmodern culture of diversity. Similarly, the capitalism of money and global capital is clashing with the movements of local value communities. Political ideologies and even social diversity are being devalued. The crisis of the EU's *ever-closer integration* idea is explained in part by its continued search for community-building power in human rights, money and other secularised ideals. In contrast, Christianity, which is the only common spiritual root of Western communities, is rejected. As secularised ideas weaken, so will the EU.⁶⁶

After two hundred years, the thesis of secularisation is again confronted with the thesis of Christianity. On the one hand, the evolutionary instinct of community survival has been awakened by the secular global society, and on the other hand, the instinct of community self-protection is coming to life, from Europe to the USA in self-defence against other religions, such as Islam. The confrontations that underlie secularisation, the opposition of Reason and Faith and the conflict between science and religion, have smoothed out over two hundred years. The chances for Christianity have strengthened; the search for a transcendent ideal, in place of the doubts of life, the wish for certainty of existence and the instinct of belonging to the community also direct the postmodern man towards the ideals of religion. However, the Christian tradition cannot revive on its own. There is no doubt that two thousand years ago, without the exceptional conversion work of Paul the Apostle, and then without the effective institutional system of the Church, Christianity would not have become the world religion that formed the basis of Western culture. However, the postmodern man lives in virtual dimensions that neither apostles nor the church can reach. He builds a community on the World Wide Web, seeks validation in virtual exhibitionism, and searches for a flood of

⁶⁶ Gyurgyák, *Európa alkonya?*, 141–197.

information in which the truth is like a needle in a haystack. In his life, dependent on artificial intelligence and robots, he is unable to cope with the destruction of nature, and he also flees from the ancient questions of existence. He is a post-Christian man who is already beyond the community-building attempts of church and politics. He lives in a tense space between the attractions of the global world and national identity, and is sceptical of political ideologies. Instead, he believes in the exciting vision of science and technology, dissolving into the colourful virtuality of the World Wide Web. The magic of machine algorithms gives man the experience of transcendence, drifting with excitement towards the world of transhumanity.⁶⁷ Science and technology present man on the World Wide Web with a picture of a fictional-fantastic future, so man is blinded by the *hybris* of his own omnipotence.⁶⁸

The picture and vision we can draw of the future today, although different from country to country, is moving towards unity. In the two hundred years since the secular founding in the USA, during social secularisation, and sometimes even against it, the Christian religious foundation has evolved, and politics and the judiciary have at times openly or covertly based their value judgements on Christian theism. Recent developments in the USA, Poland, Russia or Hungary, show that local communities are discovering the success and power of community-building that follows the national Christian ideal. Since the Reformation, Christianity has had to adapt to the peculiarities of national culture, national language and identity. In addition, it must be open to the hypotheses and deism of science, as well as to the hyperactive 'society' of the World Wide Web.

Eliot dreamed of a modern Christian society seven decades ago.⁶⁹ In his long poem *Waste Land*, seeing the moral misery of the twentieth century, he wondered how the norms of transcendent origin could be enforced more effectively in modern society. According to Eliot, for the individual, worldly prosperity has become the main, and even the only accepted goal. He sees this as a fundamentally emptied, 'negative' culture that is transformed into a pagan culture. In Christian society, the natural goal of man – virtue and prosperity in the community – is accepted by all, and the supernatural goal, salvation, would be the goal of those who have an eye for it.⁷⁰ The 'Christianity' of the state is only a reflection of the Christianity of the society it governs. The 'Christian community' constitutes the basic moral rules derived from religion for society as a whole, that is, a 'unified code of religious conduct'.

⁶⁷ Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near* (New York: Viking, 2005).

⁶⁸ Yuval N Harari, *Homo Deus* (New York: Harper, 2017).

⁶⁹ Thomas S Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982). His philosophy of society was primarily built on the work of the famous Catholic French philosopher Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism* (New York: Praeger, 1970). See also Gergely Egedy, 'Vallás és kultúra TS Eliot társadalomfilozófiájában, 1–2', *Magyar Szemle* 13, nos 9–10 and 11–12 (2006).

⁷⁰ Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, 62

At this point, Eliot's vision of a 'religious elite' may evoke disturbing historical and literary memories in many. However, the Nobel Price-winning poet himself rejected the uniformed man and culture. He saw a way out in National Christianity, warning that if it moved in a 'nationalist' direction, it would inevitably become a mere mouthpiece for the 'prejudices, passions and interests' of a nation.⁷¹ Eliot's Christian culture is one in which each local culture is a variation, and common faith is the force that unites nations in a kind of utopian world culture.⁷² Today, the strengthening of conservative politics, including national politics and national religious politics, may also be interpreted as part of this historical flow.⁷³ Conservatism recognises that the teachings of Jesus and the Christian principle of God can re-awaken faith in 'eternal truths', the search for a lost Paradise, and become a great communal force again with messages for the twenty-first century.

⁷¹ Ibid. 76.

⁷² Ibid. 88, 93.

⁷³ Ferenc Horkay Hörcher, *A Political Philosophy of Conservatism: Prudence, Moderation and Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). According to Hörcher, conservatism can be the starting point for restoring the balance between society and nature, rethinking economic and social systems, and can be the dominant paradigm of the twenty-first century; András Láncki, *Konzervatív kiáltvány* (Gödöllő: Attraktor, 2002).

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