

In God We Trust:

An exploration of views and developments around religion and trust



About this whitepaper

“In God We Trust”: a phrase that seems to symbolise trust in the state, in our economy, in politics. In reality, however, it is rather a cry for trust. We have lost trust in democracy, in the state, and in the economy, but also in the church and in Europe. Our sense of trust in general seems to have disappeared, which is why we often speak of a crisis of trust. How can religion and theology contribute to creating new narratives?

This whitepaper is based on the outcomes of two virtual round table meetings. We discussed not only the consequences and challenges of this crisis of trust, but also how religion can play a role in regaining trust.

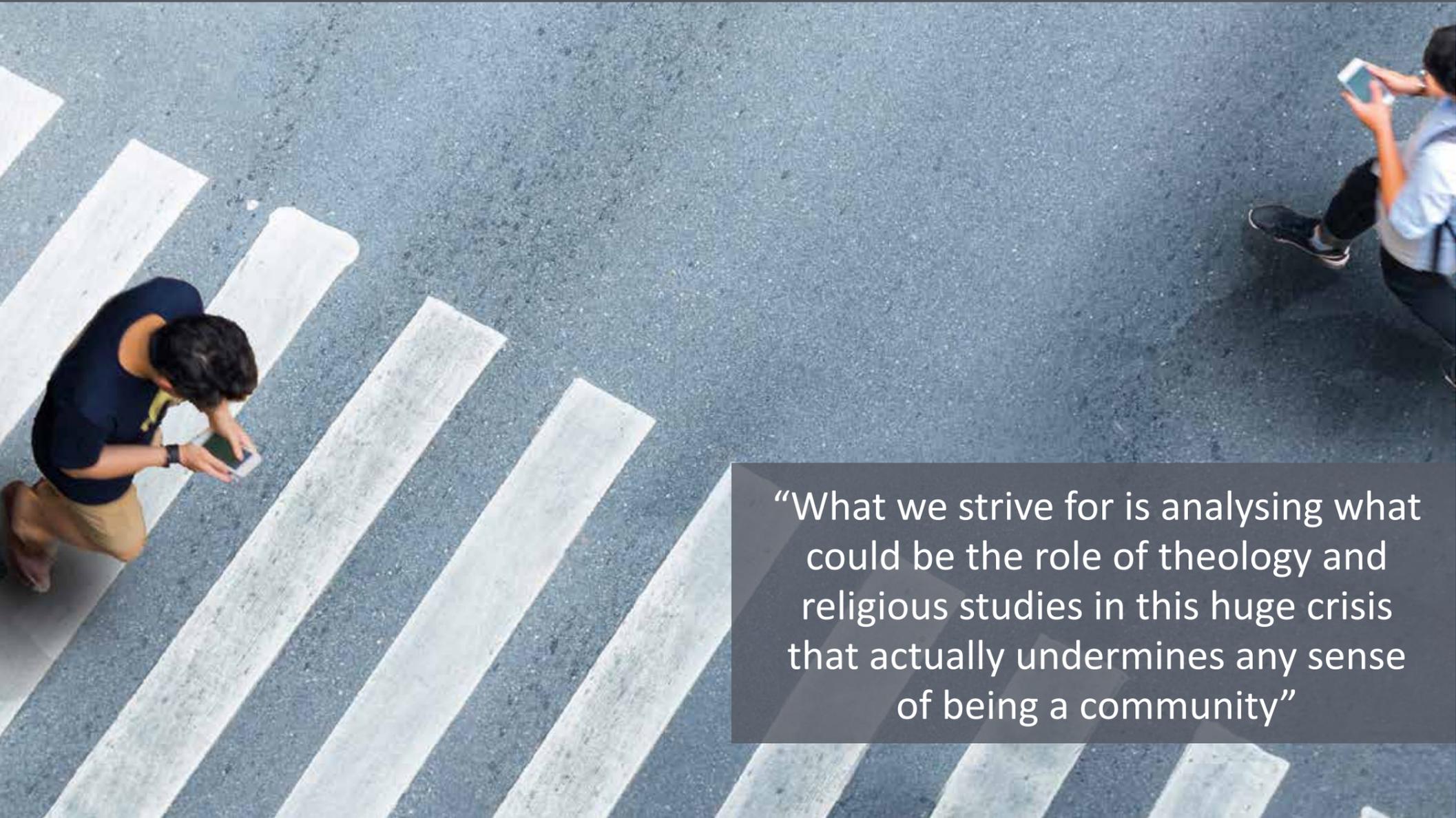
Several articles were written as an inspiration for the round table discussions. We would like to acknowledge the authors of these articles, the round table reports, and the introduction to this whitepaper: Prof. Matthias Smalbrugge, Faisal Khalil, Freddie Scott, Han Chang, and Zoë Tuithof.

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In God We Trust: Introduction



“What we strive for is analysing what could be the role of theology and religious studies in this huge crisis that actually undermines any sense of being a community”

In God We Trust: Introduction

In times not too long ago, trust was an uncontested notion. Of course, there was more or less trust, there was also betrayal of trust, but a real institutional crisis of confidence was something beyond any horizon. In God we trust, meaning that there were structures on which we could definitely rely. Actually however, as is widely recognised, we are living a credibility crisis. We trusted the banks, we trusted politicians, we trusted the church, we trusted our system of checks and balances, but none seems up to standards when it comes to trust. In particular the aspect of checks and balances can be considered extremely important. If ever confidence was betrayed, there was up to now a system allowing us to intervene. Such an intervention had as a consequence any betrayal of societal confidence could only have limited consequences.

Actually, the situation has radically changed. Not only trust and confidence are slipping out, not only are we confronted with new phenomena such as fake news and all other kinds of betrayal of confidence, the system of checks and balances itself seems to be seriously damaged. If we look for instance at the famous trias politica — the idea that none of the three main institutional powers (executive, legislative, justice) has an unlimited power, that each of them is controlled by another one, finally that each of them is independent of the other — then rightly this system of checks and balances seems to be under attack. Even though Montesquieu could not foresee modern aspects such as fake news, the rise of populism, and the influence of international companies, his system remained in our modern era a

pivotal and essential element when it came to building societal trust. Now, Montesquieu's system was rooted in a narrative. His narrative was the idea that freedom, at a personal and societal level, was extremely important and that it had to be protected against despotism and tyranny. In that sense his efforts can be compared to that of Foucault, who brilliantly analysed structures of power. In Montesquieu's view then, all power should therefore be limited power, meaning it should be counterbalanced by another power. Such a system creates trust.

Personal freedom, the equilibrium we need between our own interests and those of others have longtime been elements of the Christian narrative too. Therefore, what interests us is to know whether theology and religious studies can contribute to a narrative that would allow us to rebuild systems of trust in our society. Caveat, by saying this, we do not intend to have any missionary goal. What we strive for is analysing what could be the role of theology and religious studies in this huge crisis that actually undermines any sense of being a community. What can we say about failing narratives, about new narratives, about the importance of trust, the way confidence is lived? In short, let us really think in these times about contributing to our society.

Kind regards,

Matthias Smalbrugge,
President EARS



“Religion may be the playground of tolerance, instead of the battlefield”

Introduction

EARS organised a two-part series of virtual Round Tables on the topic of religion and trust in times of distrust. During the first meeting, our EARS members gathered via Zoom to discuss the developments on trust in Europe and the role of theology and religious studies in this huge crisis that undermines any sense of community. What can we say about failing narratives, about new narratives, about the importance of trust, the way confidence is lived? These topics were all discussed by our guests during the first digital round table session on October 23rd, 2020. Please find the report of our discussion on the next pages.

The following reports were written by Zoë Tuithof, who joined the reports as an observer

Religious plurality in a society of distrust

Looking at the situation in different European countries, recent events in France oblige us to focus our attention first on this important country. Now, recent events^[1] have indeed made clear that religion can become an element of mistrust. Neither Muslims nor non-Muslims in France feel safe. The population is fragmenting due to this sense of mutual distrust: a threatening development. How can trust in a larger narrative be reestablished for all citizens? France is a rather complicated example of the relationship between religion and state. Think about the partial ban of headscarves. The state tries to preserve a common space where religion has no influence. This goes in particular, according to the law of 1905, for public services such as the court, but debates on whether the religious influence of the Islam has not gone too far, reignites old

[1] The killing of French middle-school teacher Samuel Paty. Paty was beheaded in an act of Islamist terrorism.

controversies on this law. Minorities are especially affected by such bans and thus, they may feel unwelcome or even unsafe. On the other hand, larger parts of the population also feel threatened by an incomprehensible hate. In both senses, France can be considered a traumatised society.

“Minorities are always in a position opposed to other groups”

Concerning other countries, the same can be said for Austria, which has been a very traditional Catholic country. The country has a long history of discrimination of minorities, especially Protestants. Thus, the Austrian society may be deemed a ‘closed’ society, in which Catholicism still rules. Similarly, the state-religion relationship in the UK still privileges Christianity. The majority of primary schools are church schools. The Church of England clearly has a position of privilege over other groups, though at the same time its influence is diminishing. The increasing Islamophobia and racism in the country reveal a difficult challenge: how do you reclaim a sense of national identity in a pluralist society? Religion is therefore an important element in the context of fragmentarisation in the UK, exacerbating the feeling of mistrust.

Examples of a different nature can be found in countries such as Germany. In Germany, a positive approach towards religious freedom prevails. The state holds what they call a ‘supportive

neutrality,' meaning that it is religiously neutral but guarantees citizens the possibility to practice their religion. For instance, Germany is organising new ways to allow Muslims and Jews to practice their religion in the public sphere. Supportive neutrality is a system with many advantages in pluralist societies as it contributes to tolerance. It is a way of creating a narrative that includes religious and humanistic traditions. Moreover, it creates the opportunity for debate. The concept of supportive neutrality also applies to Scandinavia, to Norway in particular. The latter is a society that is open to all kinds of religions. However, a paradox appears: everyone is supported, but some more than others. This means that the state holds a certain position: its Christian background is still very much present. Still, this open strategy allows different faith communities to gain recognition from the state.

“The real challenge is how you reclaim a sense of national identity”

National belonging and the populist narrative

Populists in particular reject this idea of supportive neutrality. Theirs is a movement against the recognition of minorities. Populist movements now seem to create a specific narrative based on a kind of cultural Christianity that should enhance the national identity. It has become a cultural Christian populist trend in continuity with the nation. They reshape the national narrative in a strong, fragmenting way - while aiming to be unifying at the same time. It has become a common

phenomenon that nationalist groups try to appropriate a religious approach and perspective.[2] Thus, religion is being manipulated and employed to enhance nationalist movements. Right-wing groups use religion to shape their identity. Contrary to this political approach of religion, it is also true that religion, taken as a faith community, can also play a constructive role in this matter - they can bridge and bond. Religions may, potentially, have a role in integrating immigrants, facilitating their belonging to a wider national community. A sense of trust would be created when different religious communities act as promoters, protectors and defenders of minority groups.

Theologians shaping the new narrative

What can theologians and religious scholars do about the lack of a common, uniting narrative? Academic theology is a common responsibility that crosses borders. Indeed, a key issue in theology is to discuss trust. What is it? What does it imply? These are, traditionally, theological topics. That is a field in which our disciplines have crafted a certain relevance.

Theologians can probably engage in the discussion and show how religious resources are not as exclusive as populists present them to be. They can illuminate an alternative interpretation of the key resources in the Christian tradition. They could redefine the role of religion in

[2] Except for the UK, where populist movements are indifferent to religious messages, according to one of our valued members.

this matter. Their potential lies at turning around their classical way of working. Instead of interpreting texts and then applying them to the social context, they should interpret today's societal challenges with these texts as our resources.

“If we don't exceed our boundaries, to whom are we talking?”

What theologians do best, is taking seriously the convictions and beliefs of people. Religious studies and theology analyses these convictions and their differences from various points of view. They can point at different tendencies, different developments, and emphasise the specific nature of the various religious narratives. These narratives are often contesting ones, though of course there are also similarities to be discovered. Within these narratives, values are of great importance and studying the use of these religious values and their potential conflict with secular values is extremely relevant. Pointing at these similarities as well as at the potential conflicts implies that religious studies and theology implicitly contribute to what could be a future common narrative of our society. In particular when it comes to the notion of trust, this is a very useful exercise. Suffice it to think of the lack of trust that suddenly emerged in the Covid-19 crisis between on the one hand Italy as well as other Southern countries in Europe, and on the other hand some Northern countries, in particular the Netherlands. It was a debate on economic help, but in reality it was about trust and cohesion.

This clash of spirits proved that the economic frame applied by the EU was far from sufficient to solve the difficulties. Trust, humanism, and cohesion appeared to be a next-level narrative that was strongly needed.

The appeal of the narrator

Widening the scope of theology, the question can be raised: what is the relation between the narrator and the ones who hear it? The pope, as a major example, speaks to the younger generations. He reinforces their trust. Why is the pope so popular among this specific generation?

For the first time since a very long time, the pope relates to the ideals of the younger generation. He addresses issues of social injustice and promotes inclusivity. He is not a liberal, but he is in fact much more liberal than his predecessors were. The pope has a certain global appeal that rises above national differences. He is very popular among liberal media, almost like a prophet. Following in the footsteps of his predecessor John Paul II, he has made way for Catholic youth conventions to become successful again. Youngsters who normally do not attend church now go to conventions, to be part of a community. It is a simplistic way of practicing faith. Praying may become like sports, a habit. A sense of trust might be experienced through these praying habits.

The lack of trust in Europe today may have led to the search of at least one leading and public figure that could be trusted. Someone not belonging to the realm of politics. The pope might just be that

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someone. This would explain both the pope's popularity and the rise of populism in Europe.

“When the pope mentions it,
everything is going to change’

However, the pope's popularity moves in different directions. His authority is not self-evident anymore. The bishop of Rome is contested, especially by conservatives. What we now see is open criticism of the pope. His position does not remain unchallenged. This is a relatively new situation in the Catholic Church and it shows how extremely difficult it is to deal with the plurality of modernities.

So how then does the younger generation trust a pope who is aligned with a church that holds different views? How do they match these different elements? The pope represents the whole of the Church. In fact, the Church might be deemed a pharmacy - people go when they need it and only take what they like. This is possible in a postmodern society. You might like the pope, but dislike the church. Of course, the RCC is not known for its appreciation of individuality, but it has in fact a longstanding tradition of accepting differences between its members. Hence, tolerance towards those who are less involved in church activities is required. There are many distant and silent church members.

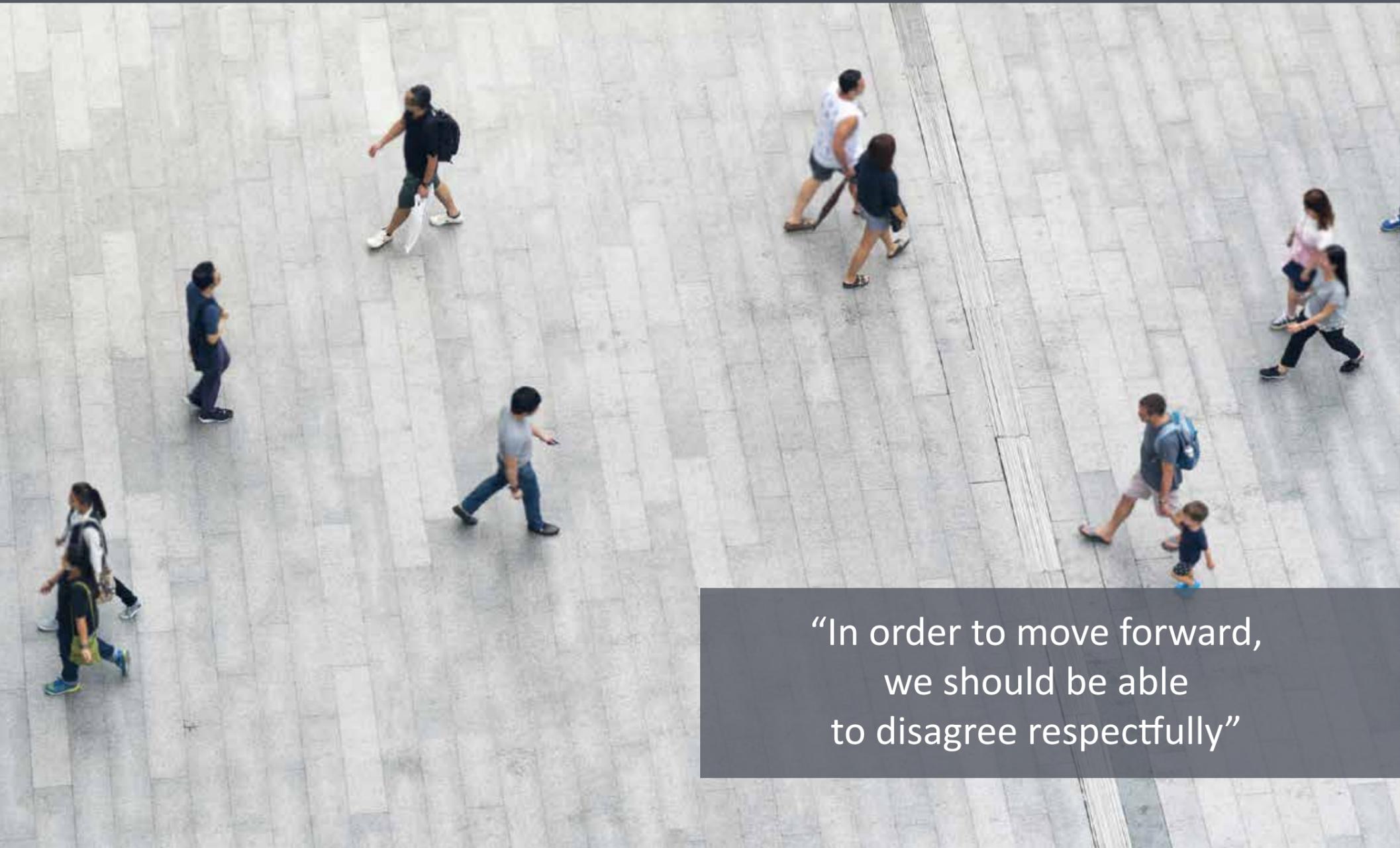
Religion as an exercise in trust

In conclusion, religion being basically a narrative, it also can be narrative about trust. But as we are confronted with the plurality of modernities, together with the plurality of narratives, trust will be interpreted in many different, even opposing, ways.

The role of religious studies and theology can then be to analyse these conflicting aspects and to help to understand the divides. Such a better understanding can be seen as a contribution to the creation of a new structure of societal trust. It also sharpens the awareness of the role values play in our society and how we possibly have reached the end of a perhaps hyper-individualistic era.

“Tolerance towards those who are less involved in
church activities is required. There are many distant
and silent church members”





“In order to move forward,
we should be able
to disagree respectfully”

Introduction

For the second meeting, EARS invited a lawyer, an anaesthesiologist, two journalists, and two professors of Theology. Our valued guests gathered via Zoom to discuss the recent developments on trust in Europe and the role of theology and religious studies in the ongoing crisis of community. What can we say about failing narratives, about new narratives, about the importance of trust, the way confidence is lived? These topics were discussed by our guests during the second digital round table session on November 2nd, 2020. Please find the report of our discussion on the next pages.

Minorities feel ignored

Minorities in Europe are wondering: whom can I trust? A telling example from the Netherlands is Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZ). KOZ is fighting against the racial stereotyping of black people during the Dutch children’s festival of Sinterklaas. The movement demands the Netherlands to stop portraying black people as white people’s servants (or even slaves). Members of KOZ asked for a meeting with the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, to discuss their viewpoints. However, in first instance the Prime Minister refused and this refusal created a lack of trust. Yet, in the second instance, they were received by the Prime Minister and their conversation was considered by both parties to be a positive one.

“Can our institutions handle
what we demand from them?”

Yet, an important question regarding this matter is raised: do we expect too much from our institutions? We expect the state to guarantee traditional fundamental rights like freedom and equality for all. But we also expect our federal institutions to guarantee our housing and an income. In particular, when our fundamental rights are under pressure, or when others’ rights are threatened, we look at our government for solutions. Nevertheless, the question can be raised where the responsibility of the state ends and where the responsibility of the society and individuals starts?

The anti-religious climate

Another example of our high-demanding society can be found in Orthodox Protestantism in the Netherlands. Due to Covid-19, only small gatherings are allowed with a maximum of 30 persons in one room. Orthodox Protestants feel violated in their right to profess their religion.

“There is a difference in proximity to the
government among different types of beliefs”

They argue that the state has no idea of the importance of religion to people and they invoke their right to worship. That argument may, in fact, be true. Religious institutions have disappeared from the governmental radar during the COVID-19 crisis. This has everything to do with the separation between church and state in the Netherlands. It has become a separation of two worlds, unknown to each other. In the

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Netherlands, we now see a rise in anti-religious sentiments, especially in the media and to an even greater extent on social media.

Up to recent times, let's say the seventies, there was a great sense of trust between church and state. They knew each other and each other's values. In that regard, it was easier to grant churches their freedom. What we see now is that state and society, through the development of secularisation, have become unfamiliar with traditional Christianity and Jewish faith, let alone with the 'black box' of Islam that entered the Netherlands. This religious illiteracy and unfamiliarity with others, especially minority groups, has created an atmosphere of mutual distrust and misunderstanding.

The freedom to offend

The lack of understanding between majority and minority groups might explain the heated debate on the limits of freedom of expression when it comes to criticising religions. This particular kind of freedom is experienced differently in e.g. France in comparison to the Netherlands. In France, freedom is deemed a sacred fundamental right. It is protected at any cost. Charlie Hebdo, for example, satirically criticises religions in a harsh way. It is in fact a modern way of traditional criticism of religion, which is an important tradition in our Western society. Therefore, it is not only a matter of freedom of speech, but also of attacking vital structures and values held by several religions. Should this truly be the objective of freedom of speech?

Now, one should be able to express one's opinion, and to disagree with others. Everyone has the right to be religious, and to not be religious. Everyone has the right to ridicule others for their religious affiliations. The question remains, at what cost?

“You are allowed to express your extremely offending opinion at all times. The question is: should you?”

One could wonder how consistent people are in their fight for freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Some might tend to criticise others because of their faith or religious affiliation, but criticism of secularity and the way the state promotes secularity seems to be difficult to accept. Though the crisis of trust has many sources, the role of religion and the way religions behave one to another as well the way they relate to secularity, may be one of the causes of this crisis of trust.

Lacking a common narrative

How, then, do we reestablish a sense of trust and understanding in our modern day societies? How do we learn to understand the other? It starts with information. Information is crucial. Journalists have an important role in this regard, as well as community centers. We need a small-scale, bottom-up approach. Personal meetings should be facilitated, for social media facilitates anonymity. What we find on social media is unmoderated information in which the truth is deemed

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'just another opinion'. This is not the knowledge we need in order to understand and trust the other. In order to create a society in which people can disagree and maintain trust, respect is required. Disagreeing respectfully is of an utmost importance to renewing our trust in the other, as well as in our society.

“In order to move forward, we should be able to disagree respectfully”

We may need to revalue religious stories. Not in the confessional way, but taken as a narrative that tells us about the cohesion communities and societies need. Individuality and secularity have probably underestimated the importance of a common narrative to cling to. Therefore, should a society not be ready to rethink the need for a common narrative? For if society does not, the gap left by the lack of such a narrative will be filled with conspiracy theories such as QAnon and by populism. Preferably, this should be avoided. Therefore, the quest for a new narrative is an urgent one. Moreover, even if religious narratives would enter the scene again, this would not imply that they represent a new confessionalism. Even religious stories can be secularised and become a shared narrative.

Providing new narratives

The question remains: who should provide this new narrative? In the Netherlands, the state has difficulties in installing such a narrative through citizenship education, whereas in France this is the traditional

role of the state. This is due to the fact that the Netherlands accept different confessional education systems, each of them having another narrative on cohesion, exclusivity, equality, gender and so on. However, the government could foster a more deepening understanding of the constitution. The constitution provides indeed a huge coherent story about society: Who are we? How do we coexist? We should not take this framework for granted. It is a valuable foundation for great narratives.

“The state has to tell the story about fundamental human rights. That is what the state is for”

Furthermore, the government should provide a platform on which others can tell stories. This is because the government does not own the only and correct narrative, though the Constitution remains, of course, the leading framework that has to be respected at all times. A diversity of stories from multiple perspectives allows us to listen and learn. Thus, the government should facilitate such conversations. Universities, the media, and churches are the institutions that could make use of the framework offered to them and create new, common narratives.

The stories that unite us

One of the striking features of the crisis of trust is the still increasing lack of trust in (semi-public) institutions. It started to fade in the 1970s and this development accelerated in the 90s, when the Internet

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became available for a wide audience. Institutions have therefore become an easy target for those who want to blame the state for any societal problem. Once again, this may be related to the fact that we expect too much from the state and that the state is more and more framed as a kind of Almighty Father. There is, in our modern society, very little appreciation for the work and role of the institutions.

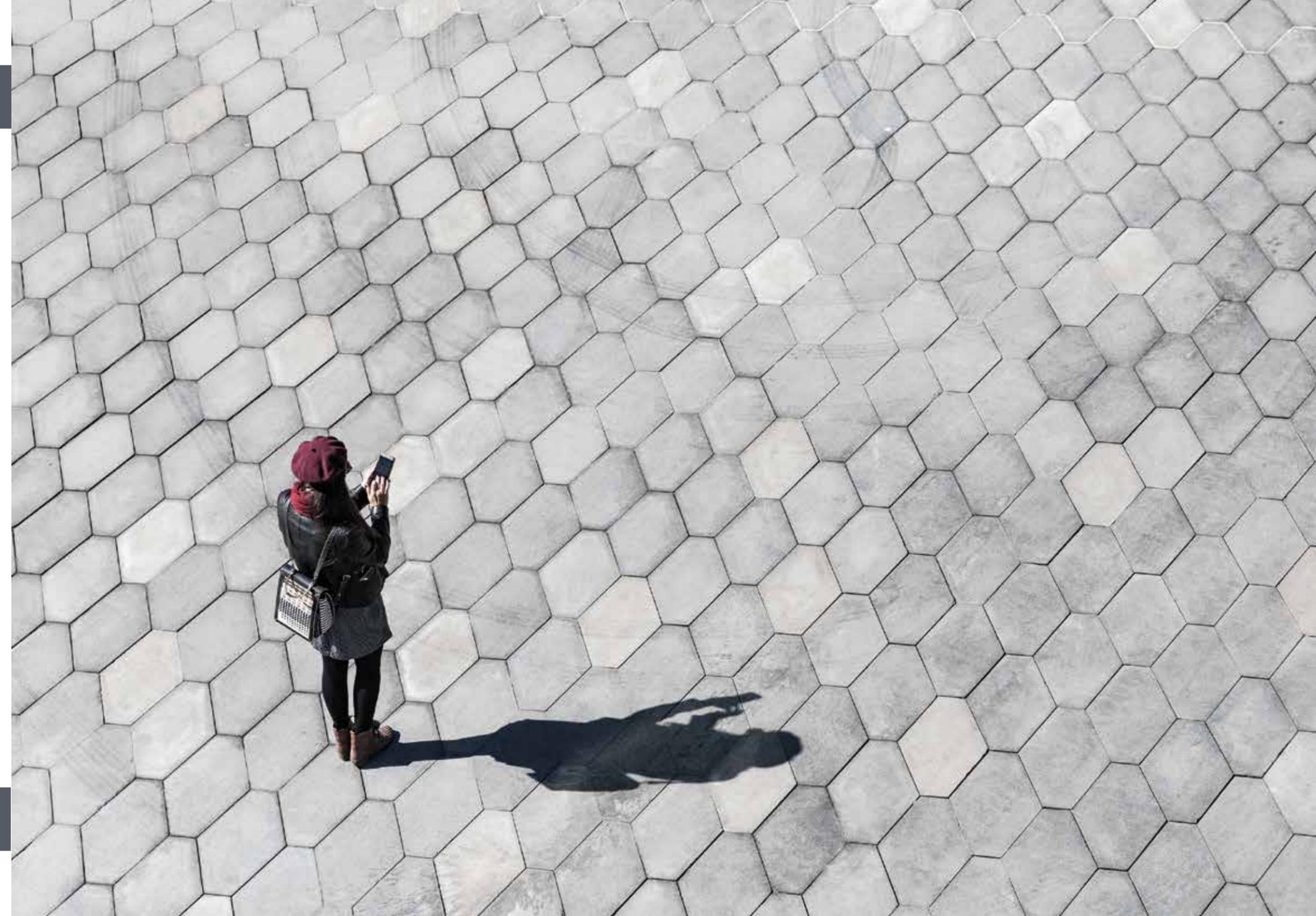
“Leadership figures who are widely appreciated must represent something broader than themselves”

In contrast to this lack of appreciation of institutions, we highly appreciate some individuals such as the pope, Dutch Prime Minister Rutte, and German Chancellor Merkel. The personal aspect is crucial. The individual has to be authentic and trustworthy in order to be trusted by the masses. Furthermore, such a trustworthy individual is the one who might be able to explain the workings of institutions and to show the complexity of systems. Though at the same time it is important to underline that many consider our actual institutions rather outdated. The parliamentary system e.g. fails to respond to the needs of a more direct involvement of the people. Hence, explaining the benefits as well as not hiding the failures or lacks of the system could contribute to reestablishing institutional trust. Therefore, leading personalities should not only represent, but also explain the workings of their institutions. People harbour mistrust to the institutions, which may contribute to widening once again the social gap.

Therefore, it is important to underline the need of bridging this widening gap.

For churches, it is important to tell their stories in a way that also relates to nonbelievers. This implies that faith communities should look for ways to tell their stories also in a secularised way. The confessional world is a shrinking one and its role is perhaps not only to continue within their own circles, but also to transform their heritage in a secularised form.

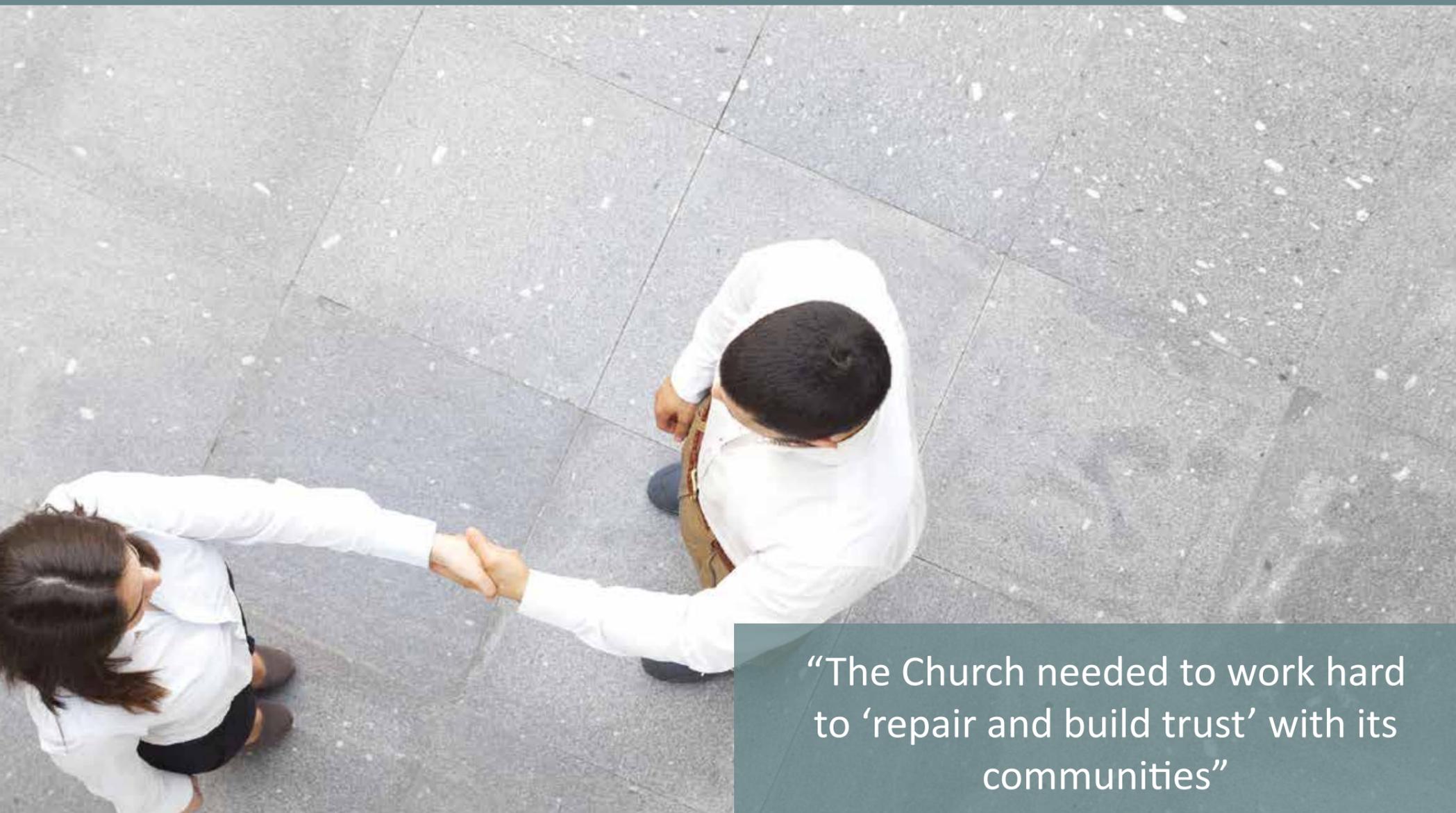
“Faith communities should look for ways to tell their stories also in a secularised way”



Appendix: Inspiration for the roundtable meetings



Appendix: Can religion contribute to rebuilding trust in Europe?



“The Church needed to work hard to ‘repair and build trust’ with its communities”

Appendix: Can religion contribute to rebuilding trust in Europe?

Han Chang and Faisal Khalil

There is a crisis of trust in Europe, affecting everything from its religious institutions to its economic and political institutions. Sexual abuse scandals in churches[1], economic crises and financial scandals[2], the rise of populist political parties against traditional ones[3], and misinformation against science and evidence, all speak of this breakdown in trust.[4] This has led to what Hannah Arendt would call a ‘society of individuals’. As Yann Algan, Professor and Dean of Sciences Po’s School of Public Affairs, argues, this has reshaped and narrowed the space available to trust: “interpersonal trust is what remains for individuals[5] to develop a common social project.”[6]

An unchurched Europe

In 2013, Cardinal Keith O’Brien of the Catholic Church in Scotland stood down after admitting sexual misconduct. Reports of the ‘paedophile priest’ in the Church, Father Paul Moore, came out in 2019. These, and other reports of sexual abuse, led to an independent review of how the Church responds to sexual abuse. The review finally concluded that the Church needed to work hard to “repair and build trust” with its communities. The former Scottish secretary, Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke, who led the review, cautioned: “Never again will we assume that the vulnerable are safe.”[7] This example speaks of the unpopularity of the established churches in Europe, to such an extent that one can speak of an ‘unchurched Europe’. In fact, it can be argued that churches in Europe lost their community far before the emergence of these scandals. European churches committed actions since before the end of the Second World War that have tarnished it in the eyes of subsequent European generations.

“It’s true we don’t have as much influence as we used to have.... We preach the Gospel and perhaps the ones coming afterwards will harvest what we have sown”

In Spain, for example, the Catholic Church and the Franco dictatorship supported each other for four decades. While the Church in Spain has largely escaped the sexual abuse scandals that caused so much damage in Scotland, Ireland and elsewhere, it has faced a transition borne out of its own actions: many Spaniards turned away from the Church as democracy and secularism became synonymous.[8] Father Gonzalo of the Church of Santiago el Mayor concedes this: “It’s true we don’t have as much influence as we used to have.... We preach the Gospel and perhaps the ones coming afterwards will harvest what we have sown.”[9] The recent debate in the UK over the role of the image of Jesus and the Church of England in racism has also revealed a similar lack of trust in the Church’s actions.

When the St Albans Cathedral installed a painting of the Last Supper portraying Jesus as a black man, many argued that reimagining Jesus in this way is only a token, one which obscured the guilt of ‘white’ Jesus and the Church of England in colonialism and slavery.[10] African Studies Professor Kehinde Andrews of Birmingham City University argued that the Church of England is “one of the key owners of the enslaved.” “The image of the white Jesus was given to us as the enslaved. It was one of the main ways to pacify us. You still have people

Appendix: Can religion contribute to rebuilding trust in Europe?

in Black churches in this country saying that ‘he will wash you white as snow’. That’s the original white saviour image, and the whole purpose of it was to embed colonialism and slavery,” he elaborated.[11] It is not surprising, therefore, that worship attendance in Europe has fallen significantly. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey on religious commitment, attendance across Europe is far lower than it is elsewhere in the world. Aside from Poland, where 42 percent of people attend worship every week, every other European country has 25 per cent or less people attending worship. In Scandinavia and Western Europe, the attendance rates are even lower, in the single digits.[12] With the traditional religious institutions having lost Europe in many ways, are the prosocial effects of religion also lost to Europe? Will Europe be unable to use the social commitments characteristic of religion to rebuild needed trust and the ever-larger communities that this trust may foster?

A private religiosity

Instead of fully conceding ground to secularism, it can be argued that religion has taken new shapes in Europe. It has become an ideological foundation for anti-system parties, which have become increasingly popular in Europe with the sharp fall of citizens’ trust, as Algan argues, in their institutions, experts and elites over the last three decades. These anti-system parties - right-wing and populist - are embracing religion to position themselves as protectors of Christianity against immigration and “the liberalism of the rich”.[13] This, arguably, has eroded trust between people and institutions even further. But there has also been a rise in private religiosity, which may help rebuild trust.

Another 2018 Pew Research Center survey, on Christian practice in Western Europe, confirms this, with the biggest share of people across the region identifying as non-practicing Christians: people who may believe in God but do not attend church or do not accept the biblical depiction of God. In the United Kingdom, for example, there are 55 per cent more non-practicing Christians as opposed to 18 per cent church-attending Christians. [14]

An unselfish religion

While a significant majority of these non-practicing Christians, as many as 60 per cent, do not support the entanglement of governments and religion, they are more likely than religiously unaffiliated people to favourably view religious institutions and its prosocial role. For example, 60 percent of non-practicing Christians in Germany agree that churches and other religious organisations play an important role in helping the poor and needy. The recent dispatch of a ship to the Mediterranean to rescue migrants attempting to make the crossing into Europe by the Evangelical Church in Germany is a telling example.

In response to the end of all state-sponsored rescue operations, which has seen around 400 people drown in the Mediterranean in 2020, the Church started fundraising coalition “United4Rescue”. “One does not let any single human drown, end of discussion,” said Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chairperson of the Evangelical Church in Germany. The coalition mobilised more than 500 supporting organisations, “ranging from congregations and student groups to diaconal agencies as well as secular partners.”[15]

Appendix: Can religion contribute to rebuilding trust in Europe?

“One does not let any single human drown, end of discussion”

The rescue ship Sea-Watch 4 was eventually purchased by the Church’s crowdfund and set sail from the Spanish Burriana. While the Church pushes for a political solution to the migration crisis in Europe[16], it also intends to move forward with its plans to continue its campaign “for sea rescue, communal reception, safe escape routes, fair asylum procedures and legal migration opportunities.”[17]

For some, the involvement of religious institutions in humanitarian work actually suggests that religion never really went away from European life, and that it in fact can be harnessed further for social good. Jonathan Benthall, the former Director of the Royal Anthropological Institute, argues for example that humanitarianism, environmentalism and the animal rights movement all have a startling religious quality to them, and that this indicates a ‘religious inclination’ that underlies the fabric of who we are. Using this inclination, he argues further, is essential for the healthy functioning of any society.[18] The question then is: can religion be used more substantively to help rebuild trust in Europe?

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission may hold an answer. Established as an official government body to create national reconciliation after apartheid, the Commission strongly relied on religious ideas of reconciliation and forgiveness to guide its work.

Religious leaders also took on the significant role of commissioners. [19] The result was a ‘spiritual engagement’ to conflict resolution and peacemaking, one which offers an overarching narrative: truth can lead to reconciliation. Europe can similarly engage with religion more fundamentally to overcome the ever rising distrust.

Reshaping religion to rebuild trust

Can this faithful society of individuals across Europe - with its belief in God, favourability towards religious institutions, and support for strangers in need - be an entry point to rebuilding trust in Europe? Can we have a plurality of values on the one hand, and still trust institutions common to us all on the other? Religion has always dealt with paradoxes. It appears that to deal with this paradox, it has reshaped itself into private religiosity on the one hand and a more compassionate set of religious institutions and organisations on the other. Together, these two may have the potential to rebuild trust by giving Europe a framework for something political and economic institutions have struggled to deliver: social inclusion and protection.

To be sure, religion can not only foster an ever-larger community to support these ends, as it has already done in the case of not only its humanitarian work and role in conflict resolution and peacemaking. It can also, as the coalition “United4Rescue” demonstrates, introduce the necessary accountability of Europe’s wider institutions. Holding these institutions accountable, paradoxically, will create trust: if European institutions are made to demonstrate they are doing what they say they would do, then perhaps more people will trust them.

Appendix: Strangers within: Can minorities trust Europe?



“With populist politics and religious fundamentalism growing and intersecting, anti-Semitism is also on the rise again”

Appendix: Strangers within: Can minorities trust Europe?

Faisal Khalil

Europe faces significant challenges when it comes to how it treats its religious minorities, and whether these minorities can trust it. Many critics and activists argue in fact that how Europe treats its religious minorities, particularly Jews and Muslims, will determine the very success of the post-war ‘European project’[1]: Europe as an inclusive and tolerant community of nations.

Trust after Auschwitz

Marking 75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the President of the Conference of European Rabbis, Pinchas Goldschmidt, warned that Jews in Europe still face an uncertain future.[2] Jews rebuilt their lives in Europe by placing hope in new structures and values, such as that of the European Union (EU). This should have ensured a future without wars, pogroms, and anti-Semitism in the continent.[3] But this ‘European project’, Goldschmidt argued, remains incomplete. Jewish life in Europe remains unfulfilled. European states, for example, have legislated against minority religions, affecting Jewish practices. Countries such as Belgium have outlawed the kosher slaughter of animals. With populist politics and religious fundamentalism growing and intersecting, such as Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary[4], anti-Semitism is also on the rise again. The number of Jews in Europe has now fallen, he said, 2 million to 1.5 million today, largely through emigration. Goldschmidt called for Jews to ask themselves, as they once did 75 years ago: despite becoming safer, could Europe be trusted with their future?[5]

Jews and Muslims in Sweden

The EU’s latest report on Jews in Europe casts doubt on this future. It shows, for example, that 90% of Jews in Sweden believe anti-Semitism is rising while 81 per cent believed their government is not fighting anti-Semitism effectively.[6] While recognising rising anti-Semitism in Sweden during his visit to Israel to remember victims of the Holocaust, the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven explained that this rise in anti-Semitism was not native but caused by Muslims migrating to Sweden. One religious minority in Sweden was threatening another religious minority.[7] Löfven’s explanation that anti-Semitism was rising in Sweden because of immigrating Muslims reveals in fact a much broader challenge Europe is facing: the first of far-right populism. Far-right populists in Europe have increasingly styled themselves as ‘protectors’ against Islam.[8] A 2019 Pew Research Center survey revealed that negative sentiments toward Muslims now strongly depend on support for populist parties.[9] In Löfven’s Sweden, for example, those with a favourable view of the Sweden Democrats, a party that opposed increased multiculturalism and especially immigration, are 42% more likely to have an unfavourable opinion of Muslims than those with a negative view of the Sweden Democrats.[10] Appeasing far-right voters by blaming or banning Muslims is, therefore, becoming a familiar political strategy across Europe.

“Do you have a bag packed?”

Both Jews and Muslims in Europe, it can be therefore argued, have reasons to be worried about the current trends. The rise in anti-Semitism over the past five years has reportedly prompted 40% of

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European Jews to consider emigration. These concerning figures were reported as part of a survey conducted by the EU agency for fundamental rights (FRA) that also revealed that nearly 28% of European Jews experienced anti-Semitic harassment over the past 12 months.[11] Of those considering emigrating, two-thirds said they had considered moving to Israel. France's Jewish community – the largest in Europe – appears to have been especially affected. In the wake of record levels of anti-Semitism, many French Jews are fleeing their country to seek a new life in Israel. According to the Jewish Agency, a third of all French Jews who have emigrated to Israel since its establishment in 1948 have done so in the last 10 years.[12] In 2015, for example, nearly 8,000 French Jews made the journey to Israel, making this the largest flight of Jews from any Western nation in a single year.[13] Indeed, a 2015 attack in a kosher supermarket in Porte de Vincennes, Paris prompted journalist Jeffrey Goldberg to ask what he called “a very old Jewish question”: “Do you have a bag packed?”[14]

“The rise in anti-Semitism over the past five years has reportedly prompted 40% of European Jews to consider emigration”

Who trusts Trevor Phillips?

Recent events in the UK have also spotlighted how British Muslims are struggling to trust the future of their wellbeing and religious freedoms in the country. The trend of blaming or banning Muslims has gathered pace in the country especially in the wake of Brexit.

[15] In his end-of-year editorial blog for 2019, for example, the editor for the UK newspaper The Spectator, Fraser Nelson, endorsed bans of traditional Muslims practices such as the veil while questioning the validity of Islamophobia.[16] No example, however, represents the breakdown of this trust than the case of Trevor Phillips. The founding chairman of the United Kingdom's Equality and Human Rights Commission, Phillips was suspended from the Labour Party due to allegations of “racism” against Muslims. While Phillips defended himself against the charge by stating that Muslims cannot be defined as a single race, and therefore, cannot suffer racism, Conservative peer Baroness Warsi pushed back by arguing that to demonise and negatively stereotype a group irrespective of their skin colour is racism and that both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are, therefore, forms of racism.[17] Referring to his past statements, she argued that Phillips repeatedly and negatively defined Muslims as a single group. Warsi clarified that the charge of racism to suspend Phillips was protecting citizens, not a faith: no religion is above criticism.[18] Trevor Phillips and the question of protecting Muslim citizens came into play again during the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, when Phillips was appointed to lead Public Health England's inquiry into the failure to better protect black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people. BAME people, many of them Muslims as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) highlighted,[19] had disproportionately died during the pandemic, revealed how social and economic inequality had made them more vulnerable to the shocks of COVID-19.[20]

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Leading Muslim campaigners, including Warsi and the MCB, raised concerns that Phillips could not be trusted, and that the appointment deeply ignored British Muslim's voices. Phillips eventually stepped down, but the debate of whether British Muslims can trust that the UK government is acting in their interest continues unabated.[21]

Trust and the ‘European Project’

Can religious minorities trust Europe? Will Europe protect them from a history of violence, give them refuge when needed, protect their freedom to believe, and heed their voices? Or will Europe treat them as strangers within? The answer to these questions may determine whether Europe can have a future free of conflicts borne out of religious discrimination increasingly made more palpable by rising anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

“Will Europe protect religious minorities from a history of violence, give them refuge when needed, protect their freedom to believe, and heed their voices?”

Or will Europe treat them as strangers within?”



“Religion has not only undergone individualisation, but also moved to the geopolitical stage”

Han Chang

The well-known secularisation theory has dominated the discourses about religion in Europe ever since its debut in the middle of the twentieth century. The theory is based on the decreasing influence of religious institutions in the public sphere and the introduction of a plurality of alternative religious practices. But this theory certainly fails to acknowledge the inherent heterogeneity of European religiosity; a shortcoming even the theory’s author, Peter L. Berger, recognised in the nineties.[1]

The secular and the religious: Boundary redefined

According to a Eurobarometer survey in 2010, in countries like Poland, Ireland, and Italy, Catholicism is the dominant tradition, while over 85% of the population in Greece, Cyprus, and Romania belong to the Orthodox Christian Church. Conversely, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and Norway, contain a relatively high proportion of Protestants (74-80%). Furthermore, the diversity of existing state-religion arrangements across Europe needs to be taken into consideration as well: among Council of Europe member countries, current institutional frameworks regarding religions range from established or official church systems, which are still in force in some countries such as the UK, Norway, and Greece, to diverse forms of mild separation allowing collaborations between state and religious communities, for instance in Germany, Belgium, Spain, or Italy, and strict separation (or *laïcité*) in France and Turkey.[2] There are also important differences between the specific beliefs and practices of individual adherents that must be considered when analyzing ‘religiosity.’

For example, on the one hand, church members may believe that “there is a God” or in “some other higher power or spiritual force”, which is not always compatible with church theology. On the other hand, beliefs in and practices of the new alternative religion such as out-of-body experiences, contact with spirits, and visions are associated with spiritism, parapsychology, or magic, rather than with religion and religious experiences. [3] Moreover, declining church membership and engagement are not always indicative of secularisation and withdrawal from a religious institution does not always mean an abnegation of one’s belief.[4] What we have seen in the past decades is better described as a decline of institutional religion, combined with a heightened individualised and diversified religiosity.

Equating church membership to personal religiosity is based on a eurocentric understanding of religion that fails to consider the global religious reality we face today.[5] Inspired by encounters with the cultural and religious others, Europeans started to reflect on and to negotiate the definition of religion as a universal term.[6] For instance, Buddhism as a non-European religion gained popularity in the West in the 19th century after European colonial powers invaded Buddhist cultural areas. It is represented in central, western, and, to a lesser extent, southern Europe in all major cities and still on the rise today.[7] And individuals who claim multiple religious identities become the common reality in our multicultural and multireligious world, which add further complexity. Moreover, the plurality of new religious forms such as yoga and meditation brings out new aspects into potential religious developments in Europe. It parallels the rise of religion in large parts of the developing world. For

example, more than 60% of Europeans report having had exceptional paranormal experiences and encounters with spirits. And this number has been steadily increasing from 20% in 1970.[8] The redefinition of religion was also prompted by religious institutions' decreasing interpretational sovereignty over "what is religion". Equipped with social and political discursive power, religious institutions in Europe were previously able to exclude a range of phenomena that may be regarded as religious in other societies. However, this influence has since declined.[9] Along with this, the recent re-conceptualisation of religion brought about new opportunities for a more modern understanding of human religiosity.[10]

The individual and the institutional: A shift in the social form of religion

The diversified religious practices, as well as personalised and individualised understandings of religion, reflect a fundamental shift in European society. No longer dictated by religious authority, the essence of religious life now allows for unprecedented personal input. [11] Church institutions have gradually failed to meet the trust of both religious and non-religious people. After sexual abuse and financial scandals were brought to light, Christian churches addressed their necessity and willingness to reflect on its mistakes, failures, and the missing liveliness in the house of God.[12] However, it seems like not much has significantly changed over time. In addition, religious institutions have difficulties to integrate into modern European society, which results in decreasing numbers of members and a decline in personal attachment to the church. [13]

"The location of religion has changed from designated houses of worship to everywhere"

Moreover, we are faced with a pluralistic culture with a wide-open religious marketplace and the challenge of inclusion of the most diverse understandings of religion without falling prey to ethnocentric prejudices.[14] It can be observed in the construction of "patchwork religiosity": this concept suggests that all religions contain insights about God but no religion provides a complete understanding of God. Therefore, one way to increase one's understanding of God is by gleaning ideas from many different religious traditions.[15] In addition, multiple religious belongings for both individuals and religious communities are common as well: one may belong to the Christian faith but also find meaning in yoga or meditation inspired by Eastern traditions. For example, Christian yoga courses are now provided in church educational facilities.[16]

Religion is not limited to the church, which makes the change of the location and social form of religion possible. Firstly, the location of religion has changed from designated houses of worship to everywhere, which also allows for more forms of religious practices at home, in nature, in cinemas and museums, or even online.[17] What can also be observed in contemporary Europe is that religion has returned to the political stage. Secondly, the social form of religion has privatised and diversified since it is no longer regulated only by religious authorities. Subjective experiences and emotions of individuals are emphasised: a person can encounter God or some spiritual being by practising meditation, and a person can be reli-

gious without belonging to the church or accepting church theology. What is more, it frees religion from the institutional power of old-style religious orthodoxies but puts religion to a position where it can be abused by other social institutions as well, for instance the political system.[18]

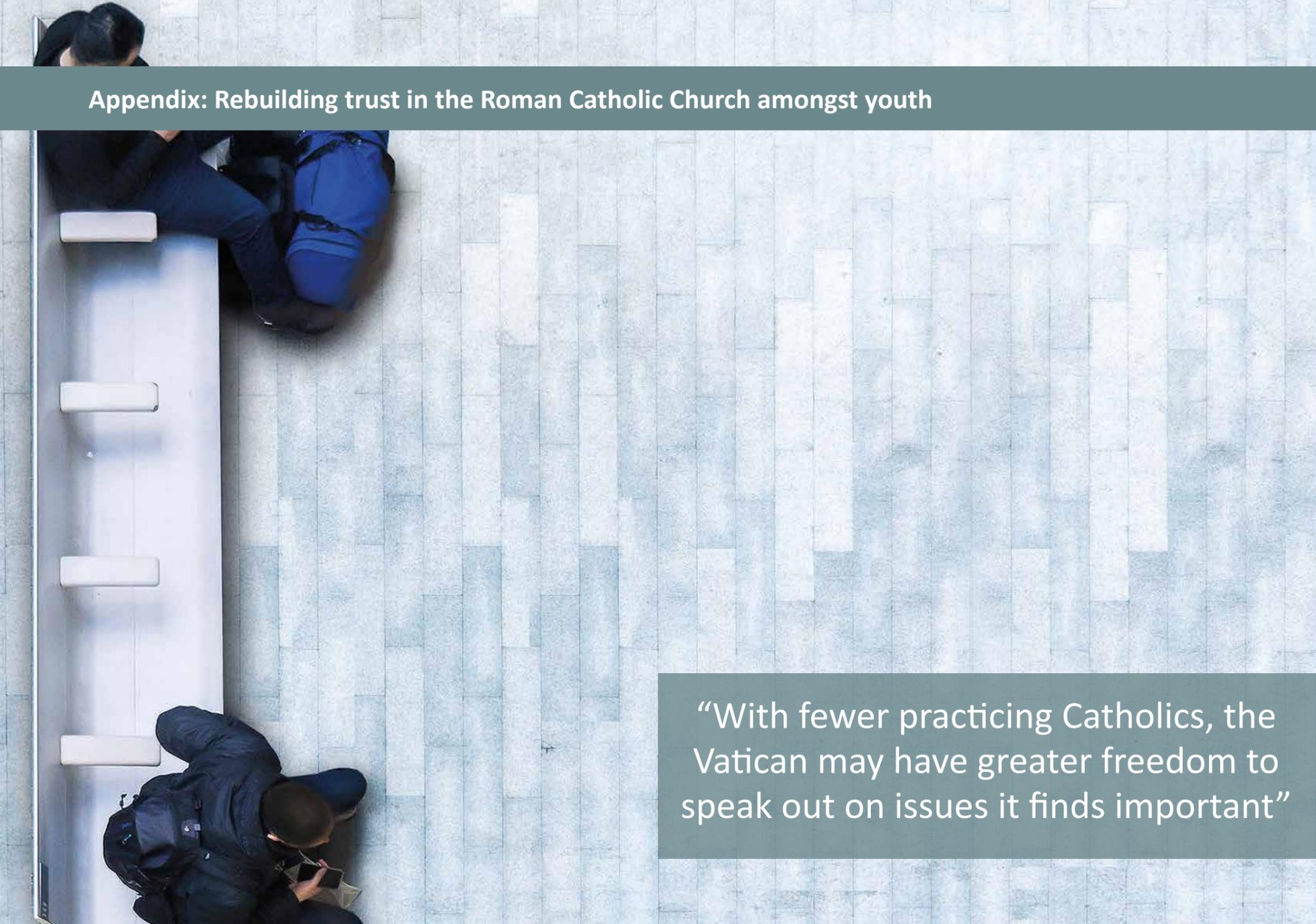
The spiritual and the practical: The paradox of modernity

The comparison between the "human-near" religiosity in our modern society and traditional religion may appear to be liberating at first sight, since the latter holds the monopoly over the definition of religion for ages. The essential characteristic of the "modern" form of religion is the de-monopolisation of production and distribution of worldviews.[19] Nevertheless, whether it necessarily translates to freedom and free choices per se, still needs further deliberation.

Modern society is highly characterised by pluralisation of livelihood chances for individuals.[20] More flexibility is given to modern people. It becomes less and less self-evident to simply be born into a tradition and accept the role attributed by it.[21] However, individualism does not necessarily lead to free choices. Individuals are 'free' to choose, in the sense that they think they face a variety of options and can choose freely. As a matter of fact, they are forced to choose, even when they may not have a persisting trust in the existing common values and institutions. One all-embracing world view for a pluralistic society seems to be more urgently needed than ever before, but it becomes impossible. Furthermore, a variety of sources supplies the market of world-views: while religious institutions offer a product that is clearly religious, other carriers of (political) religions that focus on race and nation, class, etc. continue to enter the highly competitive

market as well.[22] Besides that, constant consumption of the internet and mass media barely leaves modern people any room for genuine individuality and long-term accountability of collective representations: One's trust in one's self-regulating ability and one's self-doubt are continuously entangled. And trust demands a certain commitment, yet this commitment is constantly challenged by the paradox of modernity: trust has not simply shifted from collectivity to individuality, but it is wiped out in a sense.

What is more, religion is uncaged from the institutional power of old-style religious orthodoxies and can act more independently than in the past,[23] at least in principle. This puts religion in a vulnerable position where it can be abused as a vehicle for new ideological positions, such as in the political scene. Despite the shift of the social form of religion, its 'contents' still include traditional orthodoxies of ecclesiastic and political-ideological origin. [24] As the pace of functional differentiation of political, economic and legal functions of social life speeded up since the late Middle Ages, the process did not spare religion. Religious institutions continued to serve as the social-structural basis of morality, but they were more restricted to what was considered their 'proper' function by the modern state. In consequence, the socially and morally disciplining force of religious institutions began to weaken, while religion continued playing an important role in social life and the public sphere. In short, religion has not only undergone individualisation, but also moved to the geopolitical stage. On the one hand, the modern person has bypassed religion as an individual conviction, socially defined subjective realities; on the other hand, religion is uncovered as a political-ideological instrument and has moved from one institution to another.



“With fewer practicing Catholics, the Vatican may have greater freedom to speak out on issues it finds important”

Freddie Scott

The election of Jorge Bergoglio to the position of pope in 2013 marked a significant turning point in the political position of the holder of the highest office in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Under Benedict XVI, the Vatican had favoured an approach that aligned more with conservative ideas, based on the view that ‘it was better to have a smaller church that would pass on the faith undiluted’. Pope Francis’ ascendancy to the position of pontiff led to a change in attitudes on both issues such as LGBT rights and celibacy, and phenomena like the refugee crisis, economic inequality, and climate change.[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

The move towards a more progressive position led by Francis’ election comes at a time where the RCC has seen a declining number of adherents in various European nations. Amato’s study *Catholicism and Secularism in Contemporary Europe* described this process with the term ‘euro-secularism’, referring to the theories that explain the different processes that have led to this major demographic change. [6] This ‘euro-secularism’ has been accompanied by a reduction of the influence of the RCC in the political and social spheres. This is most notably in countries where once the Church played a key role as a voice of moral authority. This was evident during Ireland’s 2018 abortion referendum. 66.4% voted to pass legalisation of abortion, despite the clear opposition of the Church. This development led two Irish bishops to comment publicly that there had been a ‘dramatic reversal’ of the Church’s power in the nation.[7] Likewise, in 2005, Spain, a nation where the RCC had maintained a central political role during much of

the 20th century, became just the second country in Europe to legalise same-sex marriage, despite fierce opposition from many Catholic bishops.[8]

With the Church’s political and social influence having declined, the question is to what extent Bergoglio’s relatively liberal position will elevate or undermine the Church’s role in the politics of the coming decades. To understand this, it is particularly important to focus on how the youngest generations in Europe will see Pope Francis’ position. They will take up positions of power, and will be facing the problems that Bergoglio warns about today, the most directly. The youth are less likely than ever before to be active participants in Roman Catholicism. Therefore, this article seeks to analyse how the Church will be seen by both followers and non-followers across Europe in the coming decades.[9] To do this, we will focus on two issues in particular and see how Francis’ comments and actions do or do not align with the views of young Europeans.

LGBT rights

The question of LGBT rights demonstrates a key example in understanding if Pope Francis’ comparatively liberal position will help the Church build greater support among young people, or whether it will only deepen divisions amongst Catholics both in domestic national contexts and international debate. In various Western European countries, a clear majority of young people supports full equality for LGBT people, including same-sex marriage. Polling by Statista showed that in Spain, 93% of young adults (18-34 years old) were in favour of same-sex marriage. In Ireland this was 80%, in Germany 85%, in Italy 73%.[10]

Appendix: Rebuilding trust in the Roman Catholic Church amongst youth

Since becoming pope, Francis has made various comments with which he distanced himself from the overt condemnation of Benedict, for example stating that in his view being homosexual is ‘not a sin’. [11] Although not in favour of gay marriage, Francis’ softening of the rhetoric of the Vatican on LGBT issues evidently brings the Church at least closer to the views of young people in many Western European nations. However, whilst the leadership from the Vatican has moved away from direct attacks on LGBT people and rights, senior Catholic figures and politicians from Eastern Europe have demonstrated that they are not necessarily going to follow this lead. This was most clearly evident during the 2020 Polish presidential election, where Andrej Duda of the populist Law and Justice party made anti-LGBT rhetoric a key part of his re-election campaign.

Duda’s decision to place anti-LGBT rhetoric at the centre of his attempt to appeal to Poles was not directly interfering in the election campaign. However, it had much in common with comments made by senior Roman Catholic figures in Poland over the previous years. Perhaps the most notable of these were comments from the Archbishop of Krakow, Marek Jędraszewski. He used an address to mark the religious holiday of Corpus Christi in July 2020 to compare the “LGBT ideology” to communism, Nazism, and the plague.[12] This conservative perspective on the campaign for LGBT rights demonstrates the challenge that Francis faces in seeking to soften the position of the RCC on the issue. Whilst in Poland, 50% of young people stated that they were in favour of gay marriage, the number was significantly lower in Bulgaria (32%) and Romania (34%). As the

21st century progresses, it appears that the RCC will have to accept that in different nations there will be distinctly different opinions on the issue, and that the Vatican leader may not be able to count on all of its representatives to follow the same line.[13]

Migration and refugees

Similar to the division seen on the issue of LGBT rights, Pope Francis’ positions on migration represent the challenges that the Vatican faces in creating a new moral narrative that can be applied across the Catholic world. One of the first things Pope Francis did after ascending to the position of pontiff, was to visit the island of Lampedusa. Many migrants attempting to reach Italy across the Mediterranean are first processed there.[14] Since his visit, Francis has made empathy and compassion for both migrants and refugees a key part of his platform as pontiff.

In certain Western European countries, polling shows that this empathetic view puts the Vatican in line with many young people. For example, in Germany, 73% of 15-24 year olds responded ‘Yes’ when asked ‘Should your country grant asylum to refugees?’[15] Pope Francis’ politics towards migration align the Vatican with many younger people. However, it has also led to conflict with populist politicians, who themselves have used their Catholicism as part of their political appeal. This has led to direct confrontation between Francis’ words on migration and the positions of both Santiago Abascal, the leader of the far-right VOX party in Spain, and Matteo Salvini’s Lega party in Italy.[16] [17]

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This confrontation undermines the sense that Pope Francis is capable of setting a moral narrative, which all adherents subsequently follow when Catholic politicians argue for the complete opposite of what the pontiff supports.

“Pope Francis has made empathy and compassion for both migrants and refugees a key part of his platform as pontiff”

How will this moral narrative be affected in the future? The same polls that showed a large majority in favour of granting asylum to refugees in Germany, show much more scepticism in Eastern Europe; 25% in favour in Poland, 29% in Czechia. Differences between nations and regions remain clear and are likely to persist into the next few decades.[18] The effects of climate change are likely to increase migration to Europe in the next few decades. It is clear that the Church’s balancing act - on the one hand showing compassion, and aligning with the more progressive politics of young people in countries such as Germany, and on the other not alienating those who fear the effects of multiculturalism in their societies - will not be over yet.[19]

What will the Catholic Church of the next few decades look like?

Looking at the issues of migration and refugees and LGBT rights, it seems evident that simply making comments that reflect a more progressive position from the Vatican, will not by itself have the effect

of transforming the views of citizens of historically Catholic countries across Europe. As has always been the case, the RCC exists within both wider global and specific national contexts and will have to adapt to the times it lives in.

However, with the declining number of adherents in various countries, the Vatican must now accept that, far from being the leading moral authority on many political and social issues, it is just one voice amongst many. Yet, this reality may not necessarily be all bad news for the leaders of the Church going forwards. With fewer practicing Catholics, the Vatican may have greater freedom to speak out on issues it finds important. In addition, it may contribute to the debate between people with different perspectives, rather than trying, and often struggling, to speak for all people in every Catholic country in the world.

Can religion contribute to rebuilding trust?

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11. [Is It Racist to Portray Jesus as White? | Good Morning Britain](#)
12. [Religious commitment by country and age | Pew Research Center](#)
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13. [‘Things have only gotten worse’: French Jews are fleeing their country](#)
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