UNIVERSIDAD AUTÒNOMA DE BARCELONA

MASTER'S POLITICAL ECOLOGY, DEGROWTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Pamphlet on the Decline of Christianity's Hegemony and the Importance of Spirituality

Effects on life perspectives and understandings

By: **Luke DG**

July 2022

SUPERVISOR: **FILKA SEKULOVA**

WARNING: THIS IS NOT AN ACADEMIC PAPER. IT SHOULD RATHER BE CONSIDERED AS AN UNCONVENTIONAL PAMPHLET EXPRESSING MY VIEWS BASED ON RESEARCH FOR A MASTER'S FINAL PROJECT.

ABSTRACT – *English*

This pamphlet comes as a final Master's project for the Master's in Political Ecology, Degrowth and Environmental Justice. It follows an observation that perspectives and understandings of the world can be extremely different and thus hard to reconcile, resulting in great polarisations within societies. These polarisations are particularly problematic to the extent that they impede humans to realise their full potential and societies to fully be societies (i.e. voluntary associations of individuals for common ends) and thus to adequately act and react to the world's crises. Perceiving religions and the importance of spirituality in shaping understandings of the world, this pamphlet will focus on the author's interpretation of the Western world and how Christianity's hegemonic rise and decline have transformed Western ways of perceiving the world. By presenting the medieval hegemonic position of Christianity and researching the Renaissance and Age of Enlightenment for historical reasons for its decline, the author aims to understand the impact it has had on people living in the Western world. He then looks into the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's take on the decline of Christianity's hegemony as the "death of God" and the advent of nihilism, and considers his nihilist hypothesis brought to the twenty-first century and its great polarisations. In the following part, the author argues that spirituality can have a favourable role in helping to reduce social polarisation by enlarging people's sense of empathy and to contribute favourably to social and ecological change. He starts by explaining what he understands by spirituality and then suggests that the association between power and religion is really the underlying reason for Christianity's hegemonic rise and decline and the Western decline of spirituality as a whole. Then, after having defended the importance of spirituality in political and philosophical discussions and in progressive movements, he takes the focus out of the Western world to an ancient Eastern religion, Buddhism, which among others has a practical approach towards spirituality with meditation and its detachment from the ego. The author makes this opening as he argues this non-Western approach to spirituality can be inspiring to widen perspectives on life and on spirituality for people with Western mind-sets. Finally, he draws a conclusion calling for political understanding and action within a spiritual approach of unity, love and compassion.

ABSTRACO – *Español*

Este folleto es un proyecto de fin de máster del Máster en Ecología Política, Decrecimiento y Justicia Ambiental. Se basa en la observación de que las perspectivas y la comprensión del mundo pueden ser extremadamente diferentes y, por lo tanto, difíciles de conciliar, lo que da lugar a grandes polarizaciones dentro de las sociedades. Estas polarizaciones son especialmente problemáticas en la medida en que impiden a los seres humanos realizar todo su potencial y a las sociedades ser plenamente sociedades (es decir, asociaciones voluntarias de individuos con fines comunes) y, por tanto, actuar y reaccionar adecuadamente ante las crisis del mundo. Al percibir las religiones y la importancia de la espiritualidad en la configuración de la comprensión del mundo, este folleto se centrará en la interpretación que el autor hace del mundo occidental y en cómo el ascenso y el declive hegemónicos del cristianismo han transformado las formas occidentales de percibir el mundo. Presentando la posición hegemónica medieval del cristianismo e investigando el Renacimiento y el Siglo de las Luces en busca de las razones históricas de su declive, el autor pretende comprender el impacto que ha tenido en las personas que viven en el mundo occidental. A continuación, analiza la opinión del filósofo Friedrich Nietzsche sobre el declive de la hegemonía del cristianismo como la "muerte de Dios" y el advenimiento del nihilismo, y considera su hipótesis nihilista llevada al siglo XXI y sus grandes polarizaciones. En la siguiente parte, el autor sostiene que la espiritualidad puede tener un papel favorable para ayudar a reducir la polarización social ampliando el sentido de empatía de las personas y contribuir favorablemente al cambio social y ecológico. Comienza explicando lo que entiende por espiritualidad y luego sugiere que la

asociación entre el poder y la religión es realmente la razón subyacente del ascenso y el declive hegemónico del cristianismo y del declive occidental de la espiritualidad en su conjunto. A continuación, después de haber defendido la importancia de la espiritualidad en los debates políticos y filosóficos y en los movimientos progresistas, traslada el foco de atención fuera del mundo occidental a una antigua religión oriental, el budismo, que, entre otras cosas, tiene un enfoque práctico de la espiritualidad con la meditación y su desprendimiento del ego. El autor hace esta apertura al argumentar que este enfoque no occidental de la espiritualidad puede ser inspirador para ampliar las perspectivas de la vida y de la espiritualidad para las personas con mentalidad occidental. Por último, extrae una conclusión en la que llama a la comprensión y a la acción política dentro de un enfoque espiritual de unidad, amor y compasión.

RESUME – *Français*

Cet opuscule est un projet de fin d'études pour le Master en Ecologie Politique, Décroissance et Justice Environnementale. Il fait suite à une observation selon laquelle les perspectives et les compréhensions du monde peuvent être extrêmement différentes et donc difficiles à concilier, ce qui entraîne de grandes polarisations au sein des sociétés. Ces polarisations sont particulièrement problématiques dans la mesure où elles empêchent les humains de réaliser leur plein potentiel et les sociétés d'être pleinement des sociétés (c'est-à-dire des associations volontaires d'individus avec des fins communes) et donc d'agir et de réagir de manière adéquate aux crises du monde. En percevant les religions et l'importance de la spiritualité dans la formation de la compréhension du monde, cet opuscule se concentrera sur l'interprétation de l'auteur du monde occidental et sur la manière dont la montée hégémonique et le déclin du christianisme ont transformé les manières occidentales de percevoir le monde. En présentant la position hégémonique médiévale du christianisme et en recherchant dans la Renaissance et le siècle des Lumières les raisons historiques de son déclin, l'auteur cherche à comprendre l'impact qu'il a eu sur les personnes vivant dans le monde occidental. Il se penche ensuite sur le point de vue du philosophe Friedrich Nietzsche, qui considère le déclin de l'hégémonie du christianisme comme la "mort de Dieu" et l'avènement du nihilisme, et examine son hypothèse nihiliste portée au XXIe siècle et ses grandes polarisations. Dans la partie suivante, l'auteur soutient que la spiritualité peut jouer un rôle favorable en aidant à réduire la polarisation sociale en élargissant le sens de l'empathie des gens et à contribuer favorablement au changement social et écologique. Il commence par expliquer ce qu'il entend par spiritualité, puis suggère que l'association entre le pouvoir et la religion est en réalité la raison sous-jacente de l'ascension et du déclin hégémonique du christianisme et du déclin occidental de la spiritualité dans son ensemble. Puis, après avoir défendu l'importance de la spiritualité dans les discussions politiques et philosophiques et dans les mouvements progressistes, il détourne l'attention du monde occidental vers une ancienne religion orientale, le bouddhisme, qui a notamment une approche pratique de la spiritualité avec la méditation et son détachement de l'ego. L'auteur fait cette ouverture en faisant valoir que cette approche non occidentale de la spiritualité peut être une source d'inspiration pour élargir les perspectives sur la vie et la spiritualité des personnes ayant une mentalité occidentale. Enfin, il tire une conclusion qui appelle à la compréhension et à l'action politique dans le cadre d'une approche spirituelle d'unité, d'amour et de compassion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Because something accomplished is never the fruit of just one individual, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people currently present in my life, to all those who have been present but of whom I see less or no longer, to those with whom I have evolved and by whom I have been challenged intellectually or emotionally – going from the people that I am very close to (or have been), to those with whom I share less affinity; for they have all taught me something.

I would like to thank my girlfriend Mel first of all, for all the care, support and love she has given me, for our deep conversations and complicity, and for helping me go beyond "theory" and "rationality".

I would also like to thank my good friend and flatmate Merik for all the conversations we have had (that have definitely had an impact on this pamphlet), for his care and support, and especially for his great help and advice in writing the part on Buddhism.

I now thank my Mum for taking the time to review my spelling mistakes (for this paper and so many others).

I greatly thank my Dad, Mum, and Sisters for being such a wonderful supportive family, and for all the insightful conversations I have had with each one of them, reflecting on our evolving relationships within the family and on society more generally.

I warmly thank my paternal Grandparents for all the love they give me and my Sisters and for the great conversations we are able to have even though it is not always easy to understand each other's choices with such a big generational gap in a rapidly evolving world.

Warm thoughts to my maternal Grandparents, love to my extended family.

Many thanks to all my best Friends for all the awesome times and conversations we have had from the moment we met up to today and beyond (no names, they'll know).

Finally, I sincerely thank my ~~thesis~~ pamphlet supervisor Filka for her patience, help and guidance up to the end even though I wrote a super long paper and despite our diverging views.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

The subject of this pamphlet can seem a little peculiar as the final project for a Master's on Political Ecology, Degrowth and Environmental Justice. One may wonder how the importance of spirituality and the decline of Christianity's hegemony in the Western world [note] have anything to do with ecology or social justice or the building of new worlds. Well, the idea came from the observation that perspectives and understandings of the world can be extremely different and thus hard to reconcile; not only from one geographical area to another but even within the confines of small towns and neighbourhoods. This can be further exacerbated in the most densely populated zones. Of course, people do not have to think exactly in the same way to form a society, and there are always divergent opinions within social groups; diversity being more a source of richness and creativity rather than an impediment [1]. However, different life perspectives and understandings can sometimes become obstacles to the realisation of humans' inherent empathy. Some people cease to recognise others as equal sentient beings (in the case of racism for example), and instead adjust their levels of empathy according to often subconsciously constructed social categories. Thus, ideologies, religions and other beliefs more often seem to divide people rather than bring them together; constructing the unity of certain groups of people according to the distinction and opposition to outsiders. If convictions and beliefs can sometimes be useful to guide people through life, an excessive attachment to their propagation can blind some from understanding the effects their discourse, acts and behaviour have on others. Completely disconnected from each other's living conditions while blocked in a world of socially constructed ideas, humans are increasingly polarised [2],[3],[4] and, thus, prevented from coming together as communities, from creating life together, and from reacting adequately to the major crises contemporary to their existence.

What does religion or spirituality have to do with our perspectives and understandings? From the very beginnings of the human species, people have always looked for a deeper meaning to their existence. This spiritual search often led to supernatural explanations, beliefs in something bigger that would transcend individual identities, connecting people together and giving them some reasons for it all. From these spiritual quests, religions were created time and time again as people would start following some prominent figures that appeared. Whether these considered prophets were directly linked to "God" or any other supernatural entity or whether they were just more eloquent and admired figures is irrelevant here. However, on an anthropological level, it is interesting to understand how from these prophets came immense religions with grand orders, large faithful populations, and many religious wars. Far from being just matters of private faith, these religions guided and channelled people's proclivity towards spirituality into organised and institutionalised patterns of beliefs and moral conducts [5]. They structured society, gave a common meaning to people and built social morals through it. Furthermore as many religions often have claimed to be the holders of the absolute and unique truth and as they have often been built on hierarchical structures [6],[7], they have been perfect power nests for power hungry people and corruption [8],[9],[10]. They have sometimes brought about intolerance and oppression through their core message of love and compassion [11]. This has caused them to fight wars, and break up and divide time and time again [12], with rising feelings of discontent, anger and frustration. Thus, religions, from their establishments, in their transformations and sometimes up to their divisions and decline have had a major importance ~~on~~ in shaping our life perspectives and understandings [13].

In this pamphlet, I will more specifically focus on life perspectives and spirituality in the Western world, i.e. how they have been highly impacted by Christianity's millenary Western hegemony and its accelerating decline since the Renaissance. To explain the reason behind my choice of subject, it might be useful for me to explain my positionality regarding religion and spirituality. Having grown up in a Western European context within a white middle class family of Catholic, Anglican and non-religious relatives, the question of faith – particularly concerning Christianity – has been recurrent in my life. Although I made the choice not to become a Christian, I recognise that this religion – and the philosophies and ideologies that emerged from it – have had a great influence on the historical background of my family and on the society in which I was brought up. Therefore, they have certainly had a significant influence on my understanding of life and on what I consider to be moral and ethical. Although I tend to have a cautious approach to any form of strict religious or ideological devotedness, I do have strong interests for spirituality (with no specific religion) and for social egalitarian ideals. I respect all non-fascistic ideologies and all religions so long as they do not preach intolerance.

*Note: Wikipedia's definition of the Western world: "The **Western world**, also known as the **West**, refers to various regions, nations and states, depending on the context, most often consisting of the majority of Europe, Northern America, and Australasia. The concept of the Western part of the earth has its roots in the theological, methodological and emphatical division between the Western Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. The West was originally Western Christendom, opposing Catholic and Protestant Europe with the cultures and civilizations of Orthodox Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, which medieval and early modern Western Europeans saw as the East."*

Observing a strong polarisation of Western societies in times of world crises and the frustration, anger and hatred that come with it, I question (i) the role Christianity's hegemony and hegemonic decline have had on Western people's life understandings, and (ii) how enhancing spirituality could help reduce social polarisation by increasing our sense of empathy and could contribute favourably to ecological and social change.

The pamphlet will begin with a presentation of the hegemonic Christian background in the medieval period (*part II.1*), and the historical reasons for its decline starting during the Renaissance and accelerating in the Age of Enlightenment (*II.2*). In the following part (*III.1-2-3*), I will analyse this decline through the lens of Friedrich Nietzsche, a nineteenth century philosopher who presented it as the "death of God" and argued that it would provoke the advent of nihilism in Western societies. In this same part, I will evaluate what is left of Nietzsche's theory after the world wars and globalisation of the twentieth century, and regarding the crises contemporary to the twenty-first century (*III.3*). In part IV, I will argue in favour of the importance of spirituality for societies and progressive movements. In order to do this, I will start by defining what I mean by spirituality (*IV.1*) and then suggest that the association between power and religion is really the underlying reason for Christianity's hegemonic decline and the Western decline of spirituality as a whole (*IV.2*). Then, after having defended the importance of spirituality in political and philosophical discussions and in progressive movements (*IV.*3), I will look at an ancient Eastern religion, Buddhism, for its practical approaches to spirituality with meditation and its detachment from the ego which, I believe, can be beneficial for Westerners in widening their perspectives on life and enhancing their spirituality (*IV.4*). In part V, I will draw a conclusion calling for political understanding and action within a spiritual approach of unity, love and compassion.

II. Background – rise, establishment and decline of Christianity's hegemony

1. Hegemony of Christianity in the western Middle-Ages

In order to comprehend how Christianity has impacted life understandings and perspectives in the Western world – and to some extent in the rest of the world with proselytization, colonialism and imperialism – I am going to direct the reader's attention to life during the Western Middle Ages when and where this Abrahamic monotheistic religion established its hegemony.

- **Rise of Christianity's hegemony and configuration of the Western Middle Ages**

There is certainly a lot to say on the historical era of the Middle Ages. This Western time-concept covers a period following the Classical Antiquity and preceding the European Renaissance that thought of itself as returning to classical ideals. It is considered to have started with the Sack of Rome in 410 and to have lasted up to the fifteenth century. A lot happened in the whole world during this period and the historical relevancy of the term itself can be debated [1], but what I want to focus on here is on the common understanding and life perspective of the average Western person through the omnipresence of the Christian Church(es) during that time. To be clear, my objective is neither to praise nor to condemn Christianity's hegemonic role and its impact on Westerners. I certainly do not claim either that it is the only source of influence on Western perceptions of the world. It has always associated itself with other sets of beliefs, ideologies and events, some far more ancient than Christianity. However, I do believe that analysing the extent of Christianity's hegemony during the Western Middle Ages can be useful to understand the extent of its importance in shaping life at the time, and the outcomes of its decline.

Born out of Judaism in the first century, Christianity came as an "evangelic subversion" by venerating a crucified victim at a time in which Gods were praised for their strength and power. It proclaimed that all men are equal before "the one" God, which contrasted with the dominant Roman and Greek societies who distinguished civilians from barbarians and with the Jews who consider themselves as the chosen people. Thus, Christians were persecuted by Jewish and Roman authorities for three centuries. It was not until Constantine the Great's conversion to Christianity and the legalisation of it alongside other religions in the early fourth century that persecutions of the Christian minority ended. Becoming the favoured religion of the Roman Empire, it rapidly acquired wealth and power. This highly affected its subversive mission of universal equality. By 435, all non-Christian shrines and temples in the Empire had been closed down and all non-Christian rituals and beliefs had been declared illegal under penalty of death. The Empire required all its citizens to be Roman Catholic with the exception of Jews. Although Judaism remained legal, its followers were kept apart from Christians as a sub-class [2]. The Western Roman Empire collapsed in the fifth century but the Christian Church continued to thrive. By the year 529, all pagan schools were shut down under the decree of Justinian [3] because he had become increasingly suspicious and disapproving of Greek, Roman and Germanic cultures. The whole educational structure became purely religious and monks, priest and bishops took over the responsibility of teaching the mainly upper-class male pupils [4]. In the following centuries, the Roman Catholic Church continued expanding its sphere of influence outside the cities ensuring that only its doctrines were promulgated [5]. Building itself in opposition to Islam that rapidly grew from the seventh century onwards in the South and while gradually disconnecting from the Byzantine Empire in the East – up to the officialised Church separation with the Great Schism of 1054 – the Roman Catholic Church established its hegemony in the West gradually converting or extinguishing the remaining heretic populations [6].

Unlike romanticised modern-day depictions and the fantasies of the extreme right, the Middle Ages were quite a difficult era for a majority of people. Most peasants worked under the conditions of serfdom which developed in Europe between the fifth and the seventh centuries following the breakdown of the Roman slave system. This breakdown happened from the fourth century onwards when, in order to prevent revolts, landlords granted slaves the right to have their own plot of land and family in Roman territories and new Germanic states. At the same time, they also started subjugating free peasants who, ruined by the expansion of slave-labour and Germanic invasions, were willing to give up their independence in return for the lords' protection. So, although slavery was never completely abolished at that time, ex-slaves and previously free peasants were merged into a new homogenised class; the serfs. They were bonded to the landlords; this meant their persons and possessions were their master's property and that their lives were under the law of the manor. On top of the hard work serfs had to do on the lords' land, their own plot of land granted by the lords did assure them a direct access to the means of their re-production. Regarding women, although they were generally appointed to a second-class citizen status with land and offices usually being given to men, they were less dependent on their male kin and less differentiated from them physically, socially and psychologically than they would be in capitalist societies. They contributed as much as men in productive and reproductive work and domestic activities were not devalued as they came to be in the money-economy capitalist system [7].

- **Establishment of Christianity's hegemony**

Because peasants and serfs had to work hard in the feudalistic structure, children often worked with their parents as soon as they could and there was very little education in the villages. Some lords of the manor even had laws against educating the serfs as their lack of education was a very powerful tool for the nobles to exert control over them [8]. However, although direct Christian education was mostly for the male upper class, the Church influenced all spheres of society and priests would instruct people by preaching. They would tell them about how God is one and three, and that He would judge the dead by sending the wicked to eternal fire and the just to eternal life in heaven. The priest would also shape people's morals by telling them about right and wrong, virtues and sins, etc. [9]. From Iceland to Sicily and from the countryside to the towns, people were bound together through the Christian faith and morals. Ceremonies and customs had local variations of course but they were mostly organised through the Christian calendar replacing pagan festivities over time [10]. Pagan cults were prohibited and destroyed in favour of new Christian cult-sites. Prayers, mass, religious celebrations such as baptism, marriage and funerals, and religious festivities organised the life of the people and gradually gave them a sense of belonging to a bigger Christian faithful and moral group [11]. The established social order was not without any resistance of course [12], but the close repressive eye of the Church over "heretic" behaviours on the one hand, and the strong belief in Purgatory on the other did model individual behaviour into respecting the sayings of the Church. Through the faith put in heaven following a morally-led life, it gave both a sense of meaning to and of acceptance of the sufferings and injustices of life on earth seen as a pilgrimage to another life [13]. As far as we know, scepticism and disbelief were not totally absent but remained extremely rare. Most people labelled as heretics were in fact Christians who merely diverted from traditional Christianity but generally shared the same basic world-view [14].

However one must not be mistaken, for, although the Western Middle Ages were gradually homogenised by Christian assumptions of society, they were not such a static world as they are commonly portrayed. Many medieval villages were the theatres of relentless class struggles in which villagers would gather together to confront the feudal structure and refuse to pay taxes to the nobles and the tithe to the clergy. This remained a contained problematic for the Church with its empowering Gregorian reforms and its occasional ex-communications until the late twelfth century when heretic movements questioning its supreme authority gradually grew stronger [15].

The Western world's Middle Ages history was not completely uniformly Christian either; Christianity only gradually replaced paganism throughout Europe, and it took a long time to be completely implemented (back) in the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, nearly all Iberian territories were rapidly conquered by Islam in the early eighth century. Although some territories in the North were taken back by Christians only a few decades later, it took centuries for Catholic monarchs to reconquer the whole Peninsula. The last vestige of Muslim rule only disappeared in the late fifteenth centuries in Granada [16]. Moreover, Jewish minorities progressively grew bigger as they migrated from the Southern territories the Christians had taken (back) from the Muslims to Northern Europe. This migration was supported by local authorities as they were interested in Jewish economic skills and knowledge gained in the more advanced southern regions of Europe. Thus, Church leaders initially made sure Jews would have sufficient rights to live securely and peacefully within Christian society. However, they also limited any Jewish behaviour that could have threatened the Christian social norms and order, and local populations were overall quite unwelcoming and intolerant towards these new comers. Furthermore, during the twelfth century, the Church attempted to prohibit Christians from taking interest on loans from other Christians as it was considered a sin of usury. Jewish business people were not prohibited from taking interest and quickly specialised in moneylending because of the strong support they received from local rulers who saw valuable economic interests in it. Of course, this didn't help their integration and strongly increased a sense of hatred against them [17].

Even though the Western Middle Ages were not hermetic territories and neither completely religiously homogenised nor absolutely stationary, they were territories unified by Christianity and its association with local power structures. Because of the religion's ability to penetrate in all spheres of life – from the most private thoughts to the most public events and social organisations – it is safe to say that Christianity had a tremendous importance on the common individual's understanding and perspective of life during that period of time. One can wonder to what extent Christ's religion impacted people's thoughts, behaviour and ways of relating to others. Did having a common understanding of life and death and well identified morals help societies to be more empathetic and harmonised? Or was the Biblical holiness rather a façade covering and justifying great inequalities, and in which some shamelessly sinned and others struggled and felt cheated? More generally, what potential can spirituality really have for societies when it is constricted by the organisation of strong religious power which furthermore directly or indirectly participates in justifying inequalities and oppression? For better and for worse – from its messages of love and compassion to its power abuses and oppressions – Christianity has played a substantial role in the shaping of the Western world and, to some extent, to many other places in the world. What we are going to look into now are the historical processes that caused the gradual divisions and decline of such an immersive social and spiritual structure.

2. Decline of Christianity's hegemony

Christianity's hegemony started to decline from the end of the Middle Ages during the Renaissance and this decline accelerated in the Age of Enlightenment. Rather than giving a historical timeline of the events participating in this decline, I will explain them divided into four categories covering the period from the mid-Middle Ages to the end of the Renaissance (*2.1*):

- ➔ Power conflicts
- ➔ Struggles for freedom and equality
- ➔ Struggles & power
- ➔ Knowledge disruptions

Then the Age of Enlightenment and the nineteenth century will be two separate categories marking the acceleration of the hegemonic decline.

2.1 From the mid-Middle Ages to the end of the Renaissance

- **Power conflicts**

Power conflicts within the Church or with its allied royalties, lords and aristocrats were best kept avoided to keep its unity and full hegemony intact. However, some important power conflicts took place, nevertheless.

During the Middle Ages one major division was officialised amongst Christians: the Great Schism between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches in 1054. The reasons for this division were linked to geographical, linguistic and theological differences. Because this great division was clearly defined geographically – with the Orthodox Churches in the East and the Roman Catholic Church in the West – it did not interfere too much in the Catholic social order in the West [1].

In the late 14th century, an important dispute emerged within the Catholic Church between bishops close to the French Monarchy who wanted the papacy to be established in Avignon and bishops close to the Holy Roman Empire who wanted it established in Rome. This was known as the Western Schism and caused the simultaneous existence of two to three rival popes all claiming to be the official Head of the Catholic Church. Although this only lasted 39 years, it did have an impact on the unity of the Catholic Church and eroded its authority and capacity to proclaim the Gospel [2].

In 1534, after the Protestant reformation (see part *Struggles & Power* below), the Church of England separated from the Catholic Church so that King Henry VIII could annul his wedding. The operation was completely political at the time and it created the Anglican Church of which the Head of Church is no longer the Pope but the King or Queen of England. Initially maintaining the Catholic doctrines, it underwent a Reformation a couple of decades later [3].

- **Struggles for freedom and equality**

As previously mentioned, the serfs were not completely passive towards their labour obligations. Gradually their discontent grew against the many abuses of the lords and the Church's hypocrisy and greed. By the eleventh century, the Church had further grown into a despotic power; it used its alleged divine investiture to govern with strong authority and to enrich itself greatly by many means of extortion. Common practices were to sell absolutions, indulgences and religious offices and it focused its preaching on the sanctity of the tithes. It got to the point that the clergy would not baptise, grant absolution from sin or bury the dead if it did not receive some compensation [4]. Moreover, during the first half of the thirteenth century in Europe, the Great Famine and then the Black Death severely reduced European populations (around one third died). This demographic collapse had a profound impact on European social life and on many people to question their faith in the Church. Confronted with the possibility of sudden death, people desired to enjoy their time on Earth while they still could, with no attention to social norms or thinking of the future. But the most profound impact was the intensification of the labour crisis; with the work force greatly reduced, serf labour became scarce and this shifted the power relation to their advantage. In the mid-thirteenth century, the lords experienced massive withdrawals of labour on their lands; the serfs would not go, or go too late so the crops would spoil or they worked sloppily with insubordinate attitudes. The lords needed to increase their supervision and vigilance to counter these actions. Additionally, a growing landless proletariat (prostitutes, defrocked priests, urban and rural day labourers) emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and aspired to great changes [5].

By the late twelfth century, heretic movements had grown bigger than ever and were well organised. They denounced social hierarchies, private property, corruption and accumulation of wealth. Alas, any form of social and political insubordination, of criticism of the order and corruption of the Church, and of criticism of social hierarchies and economic exploitation were considered and condemned as heresy. The Church attempted to respond to this growing movement threatening its religious orthodoxy and social order with a system of oppressive means: the Medieval Inquisition. A lot of these rebellious movements quickly collapsed as soon as they were met with force but people had gained more confidence in their views and were more inclined to resist clerical exploitation. Some of the main heretic movements had imagined concrete social programs – in which women had a more equal position to men for instance – and reinterpreted the religious tradition. They believed that God no longer talked through the clergy because of its greed, corruption and scandalous behaviour. Heretic sects – Cathars and Waldenses amongst the most famous ones – called for spiritual renewal and social justice. They flourished among the "lower classes" for more than three centuries as the most important opposition movement of the Middle Ages and greatest threat to the Catholic Church at the time. However, little is known of them today because of the fierce determination of the Church to annihilate them and erase every trace of their doctrines with their crusade missions to "liberate the Holy land from the infidels". Most heretic movements did not survive the thirteenth century's great purges and the Holy Inquisition continued through the fourteenth century, but the heretics who did survive continued to live as they did before, only more discreetly and their faith silently travelled through time [6].

These struggles for freedom and equality were important threats to the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church, but because of the lack of powerful institutions on their side, these threats were rapidly crushed.

- **Struggles & power**

With strong figures taking the side of the struggles for more freedom and equality and backing up their fight with the original message of the Christian messiah, these struggles started to have more weight and possibility to succeed against the ruthless Catholic institution, its repressive methods and corruption.

Around a century after the Church had crushed the heretic movements with its Holy Inquisition, John Wycliffe, an English scholastic philosopher, priest and professor, became an influential dissident within the Roman Catholic priesthood in England (which had been more exempt from "heretic" movements until then). He questioned the clergy's power and luxury privileges and claimed that there was no scriptural justification for the papacy. Yet again, both the accumulation of wealth and property of monasteries and of the nobility were criticised, and this threatened the enforced social order built on the unity between the Church and the nobles. Wycliffe's dissidence influenced the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, which troubled the feudal system in England until the rebels were finally executed. He died three years later, but it was only in the early fifteenth century that the Church persecuted his followers and that he was officially declared a heretic, excommunicated and his writings banned [7].

In the early fifteenth century, Jan Hus, a Czech theologian and philosopher, also opposed many aspects of the Catholic Church. He founded the Hussitism dissident movement, which grew in some territories of the current Czech Republic, Germany, Poland and Slovakia —until it was severely persecuted by the Catholic Church and Jan Hus was ex-communicated and burned for heresy [8].

Thus, even when rebellious fights for justice and equality had more support from powerful dissidents, the Catholic Church and its aristocratic allies still succeeded in containing them. However, after centuries of localised uprising against the hegemony of the Catholic Church and the feudal system and as a more human

centred perspective of life was growing in the West, it could only be a matter of time before a challenge to the comfortably settled Catholic authorities was successful.

This happened in 1517 with Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses which criticised the abuses of power of the higher clergy and the pope, and that led to the Reformation. Luther was a Catholic monk and, like his predecessors, he wished to get back to the origins of Christianity with the Bible and away from traditions developed outside of the Holy Scripts, and from the excesses and corruption of the Catholic Church. In order to do this he translated the Bible and propagated it along with his Ninety-five Theses with the help of the recent printing invention. The Theses were quickly reprinted and translated, and distributed throughout Germany and Europe and Luther really hoped this would strike a sufficient spark to reform the Church; he did not wish to split it. However, no conciliation was reached with the Catholic order who excommunicated Luther and reaffirmed that the Christian faith lays not only in the Holy Scripts but also in the Christian traditions. As was the case for his predecessors, the rebellion could have stopped following Luther's excommunication and the hunting down of his supporters. However, because printing had enabled a rapid widespread critique of the Church and because the Reformation was backed by many nobles, the strict rejections from the Catholic Church caused a new great schism and the beginning of Protestantism. Indeed the political configuration of Germany – a large number of small states loosely associated with the Holy Roman Empire – was favourable to the reformation with many rulers for whom the thesis made complete sense, and others for whom Lutheranism was a great occasion to assert their local power against the rule of the Emperor. Gradually a division line became clearer between pro-Protestant and pro-Catholic states and particularly deadly religious wars resulted out of it spreading in the rest of Europe which lasted up to around the mid-seventeenth century [9] [10].

- **Knowledge disruptions**

Power conflicts and movements struggling for freedom and inequality are no doubt important events that have weakened the Christian Church and threatened its indivisibility and supreme hierarchy. However these events might often not have happened, or to a lesser extent, without other existing circumstances and specific prior or co-occurrences initiating transformations of views and understandings of life, society, justice and so on… Some remarkable events, scientific discoveries, technological inventions, new intellectual reflections and the spread of information within Western territories, but also ideas coming from outside, have deeply impacted Western medieval worldviews and, thus, troubled the one worldview preached by the Roman Catholic Church. For instance, ideas coming from Humanism and the Renaissance certainly gave a new breath of thought spreading throughout Western Europe and, thus, reinforcing opinions in favour of the Reformation. Furthermore the occurrence of the printing revolution played a major role in its mass propagation.

Of course, these occurrences marking "knowledge disruptions" were not necessarily destined to undermine the hegemonic religion, even when they contradicted some of its teachings through new discoveries or when they pointed out contradictions with its Holy Scriptures. I believe that it was rather the ways in which the representatives of the Church decided to respond to these "inconveniences" that determined whether they would really threaten its institution or not. Regarding the Reformation, a completely different outcome might have occurred if the Roman Catholic Church had been more open to dialogue and compromise on what they could reform and what they would not. And one could have imagined that after such an important division of the Church, the Catholic authorities would have been more cautious in their approach to changes, and more inclined to question its dogmas and founding institutions – if only for the survival of the Biblical message itself. Ironically, however, the creation of Protestantism made the Catholic Church stricter and more ruthless to any appearing threats to its hegemonic hierarchical structure, as we will see in the following paragraphs.

Evolution of ideas with Humanism and the Renaissance

From the 1350s, city-states of northern and central Italy started to have great economic success. They rapidly expanded their commercial activities and had cultural exchanges with the eastern Mediterranean. This period – known as the **beginning of the Renaissance** – brought back antique culture and knowledge of Greco-Roman classical period to Italy and then to the rest of Europe in the following centuries. This revival of the arts, literature and philosophies of the Antiquity made people increasingly see the world from a human-centred perspective which was later depicted as **humanism**.

This of course had a powerful impact upon religion. Although humanist thinkers did not give up their Christian faith, they did move away from the scholastic schools of thoughts and from the world perceived as a divine creation. Coming as a direct legacy of the traditional Christian belief, humanism does not generally deny the existence of God. However, humanists do sanctify humans insisting on the active role of human intellectual capacities in elaborating reality. With the beginning of humanism, people increasingly paid more attention to the mortal life rather than merely hoping to reach the promised afterlife. Humanism brought a new spirit of scepticism in the Western world. Important Christian humanists such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Alfonso de Valdés and Joan Lluís Vives were committed to the study of the Bible and the reform of the Church criticising both Greco-Roman texts and Holy Scriptures. They objected to the manner in which the Church controlled what people could study, discuss and share with each other [11].

In the fourteenth century, Italian humanists from Florence such as Leonardo Bruny and Niccolo Machiavelli developed an ideation of civic humanism: a form of Republicanism inspired by the governmental forms of ~~the~~ Antiquity. It can be argued that the Florentine elites' initial reason to build on civic humanism uplifting values of freedom of speech, citizen-equality and the right to self-government was in fact to strengthen their position and elitist interests against the despotic Milanese. Nevertheless, the Florentine's ruling class conceded in building a sense of citizenry engrained in the Christian moral foundations; from the Middle Ages' subject dedicated to a sinless life for the attainment of heaven, to the model of the Renaissance citizen solely devoted to God and country. An emphasis was put on education to create a citizenry able to speak and write with eloquence as a way to making a better society. Gradually becoming more of a laic movement with moral foundations taken away from the Church, its sense of civic duty profoundly impacted the foundations of the civilizational structure of the West today [12].

The spread of information with the invention of the printing press and the emergence of staggering discoveries during the Scientific Revolution

In the mid-fifteenth century, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, which enabled a radical change in the spread of information and knowledge. Before that, the ability to circulate information was in the hands of intellectuals, churches and rulers. Thus the printing revolution did not only allow widespread access to knowledge and education, but this also resulted in a loss of power of the Church and other authorities [13]. The Bible was the first book to be printed in Europe. The Protestant Reformation was greatly facilitated by the printing revolution but this propagation of information also generated large quantities of polemical new writings problematic both to the Catholic and Protestant Churches. In the sixteenth century, both Churches and governments in most European countries reacted to the heresies flowing from the printing presses by attempting to regulate and control them. Official licenses were required for printers in order to control what

they could print, and Catholic authorities started publishing the *Index Librorum Prohibiturum* – a list of prohibited books considered to be heretical or immoral. This list was only abolished in 1965 by Pope Paul VI [14].

With humanism came further physical studies of man and the material environment. In the early sixteenth century, the mathematician, astronomer and Catholic canon Nicolaus Copernicus formulated a model of the universe for which the sun rather than the earth was at the centre. His model was published for a wider audience in 1543 in his book *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*. This is known as the beginning of the Copernican Revolution – a paradigm shift from geocentrism to heliocentrism – and the Scientific Revolution; a period marked by a series of events leading to the emergence of modern science in the Western world and transforming the views of society on their environment. Heliocentrism had already existed during Antiquity but had been eclipsed by Ptolemy's geocentrism in the second century, which had largely been adopted by Christianity from that moment on. Although the Church was not uniformly against the new heliocentric theory and did not react officially to Copernicus' publication when it came out, it strongly sided against it a few decades later. In the early seventeenth century the Catholic mathematician and astronomer Galileo Galilei's public support to Copernicus' theory was strictly condemned by the Church and prosecuted by the tribunal of the Roman Inquisition. It is important to note that although neither Galileo, nor Copernicus before him, criticised the Holy Scriptures, Galileo's career coincided with the strong reaction of the Catholic Church to the Protestant Reformation. Because geocentrism was such an established belief at the time when the Catholic Church was struggling to maintain its authority in Europe, the Roman Inquisition strongly reacted against heliocentrism and any other seemingly subversive theories. Nearly 300 years later – in 1983 – Pope John Paul II declared that the Church had been mistaken in condemning Galileo and that, using Galileo's original argument, the Bible does not always describe the physical world and holds both literal and figurative interpretations [15].

In 1637, the Catholic philosopher and mathematician René Descartes published his *Discourse on the Method* in which he elaborated a scientific method and tackled the problem of scepticism by establishing his line of reasoning as doubting everything in order to assess the world from a fresh perspective clear of any preconceived notions. Descartes believed in God but, because of his own reasoning, he followed a rational method to prove His existence; this is referred to as the ontological proof of the existence of God [16].

In 1687, the mathematician, astronomer and theologian Isaac Newton published his book *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in which his laws of motion and universal gravitation removed the last doubts about the validity of the heliocentric model of the cosmos. Critical of Catholicism and several Christian dogmas, Newton's motivation to unravel the truths of existence was nevertheless guided by his faith in God [17].

Although many scientists such as Copernicus, Galileo, Descartes and Newton remained practicing Christians, their ideas and discoveries were persecuted by the Church authorities overall condemning science as heresy. This did not stop scientific investigation but rather brought criticism on the Christian institutions and faith, and embarrassment to many of its intellectuals who really embraced new knowledge and sought to celebrate science as proof of the truth of Christianity. Descartes and Newton marked the end of the Copernican Revolution and the beginning of the Enlightenment period.

2.2 From the Age of Enlightenment into the modern era

- **The Age of Enlightenment**

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, intellectual and philosophical movements dominated Europe desiring a greater pursuit of human happiness and of knowledge obtained by means of reason and scientific proof. The Enlightenment saw two main lines of thought with one aiming to accommodate reform and the traditional systems of power and faith, and the other more radical one advocating democracy, individual liberty, freedom of expression and eradication of religious authority [18].

Indeed, the Enlightenment period followed the century of European wars resulting from the Protestant Reformation. Consequently, theologians of the Enlightenment wished to reform their faith back to its non-confrontational roots and avoid religious controversies spilling over into politics and warfare in the name of their faith in God. Enlightenment scholars such as Baruch de Spinoza and Moses Mendelssohn wished to remove the political power from organised religion in order to prevent more intolerant religious wars. They judged religion on its moral impact on society rather than on its theology and believed that an inherently good religion rooted in instinctive morals and faith in God should not need force to maintain order over its believers [19].

The Age of Enlightenment was not a homogenised movement against religion; many thinkers remained strongly committed to their Church. However, while many early writers such as Descartes and John Locke attempted to use rational reflection within a Christian framework, the use of rationality to defend Christian dogmas would clear the path for other thinkers to an increasingly secular assessment of the world. A foundational shift took place from the understanding of faith to its required justification. Rejecting divine knowledge and following the search for rational theology, many enlightenment philosophers diverged from Christianity and started advocating Deism; the empirical reasoning and observation of the natural world determining by itself the existence of a Supreme Being, creator of the universe [20]. Then Atheism – a more radical tendency with an absence of belief in any form of deity and completely separating morality from theology – originated out of Deism, but was not very significant until the late eighteenth century. Nevertheless, although some criticised the Catholic clergy and Churches' authorities quite vigorously, most Enlightenment thinkers did not fundamentally reject Christianity and saw atheism as a threat to society. Even though he was an advocate for tolerance, the philosopher and deist John Locke asked authorities not to tolerate atheism because he believed that the denial of God's existence would undermine the social order and lead to chaos [21]. The philosopher and deist Voltaire also expressed his concerns about atheism stating that "if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." [22],[23]

Starting from the seventeenth century but increasingly more so in the eighteenth century, intellectuals such as Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Gassendi, Spinoza, David Hume, Denis Diderot, La Mettrie and d'Holbach progressively developed the philosophical worldviews of metaphysical naturalism and/or of materialism. Naturalism is an understanding of the world as nothing more than natural elements, principles, and relations of the kind, which can be studied by natural sciences, i.e. a rejection of any supernatural concepts. Materialism is a theory that existence is merely physical matter, which is the only fundamentally real substance in nature, thus putting aside any sense of spirituality. Some Enlightenment intellectuals rejected materialism such as Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1788). He was not completely hostile to naturalism however, embracing more of a liberal naturalism as the respect of scientific explanations and results without supposing that sciences are our only resource for understanding humanity and the world. However, as naturalism and materialism grew stronger, deism slowly declined and atheism became a more important belief with a few prominent figures such as the Baron d'Holbach, famous for his writings against religions in the 1760s and 1770s [24].

In a geographically non-uniform and gradual way, Enlightenment grew as the light of rationality and reason in opposition to the obscurantism and conservatism of the Church, or at least to various features of religion. Enlightenment thinkers had abandoned the Christian theologians' and officialdom's characterisations of knowledge according to whether it helped or hindered human salvation. Instead, they judged knowledge to be good if it could be used to validate experiences and phenomena that could be observed in the material world. The authority of the Christian Churches felt threatened on many grounds. They were threatened by new scientific discoveries such as the geologist Jean-Etienne Guettard's research in 1746, this opened new debate on the reliability of the Bible as it seemed to show that the earth was older than what the Old Testament timelines suggested at the time. They were threatened by important publications emphasising these discoveries such as Diderot and d'Alembert's Encyclopedia published between 1751 and 1772, this put forward an agenda of secular thought and open-mindedness across Europe and beyond. They were also threatened by the many philosophical and political writers of the time criticising governments and religious organisations such as Spinoza, Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, Paine, Kant, d'Holbach and many more (with very different views and positions of course) [25].

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution started, the bourgeois class was getting richer and stronger and the enlightenment ideals had been spreading through Western societies. The American Revolution broke out, resulting in the Thirteen Colonies of British America claiming independence from the British Crown. In 1776, the statesman Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America. He used many Judeo-Christian ideas in his writings, but also drew on Enlightenment ideas – especially from John Locke's essays – such as the separation of church and state, the rights to property, to free speech, to the press, to religious practice, and humans' inalienable rights to liberty and happiness. In 1789, the French Revolution took place based on Enlightenment ideas but with a much more secular approach; God was removed from the state and all the emphasis was put on reason. The Catholic Church had seemed hopelessly incapable of responding to the challenges it faced with the new political doctrines, and rapidly changing social and economic circumstances such as the accelerating growth of cities and the burgeoning industrialisation engendering class conflict. The Ancien Régime was overthrown and with it the sacrosanct alliances between throne and altar, and between sovereign and church. The Church lost its many privileges and properties and was actively persecuted. The French Revolution was the culmination of the Enlightenment vision of throwing out the old authorities to remake society along rational lines but, unfortunately, this vision devolved into the bloody Terror, showing the limits of its own ideas and marking an end to the Enlightenment period [26].

- **Nineteenth century: Romanticism, Atheism… Turmoil and accelerated change**

Enlightenment Deism had slowly declined during the eighteenth century and mostly vanished as the Enlightenment period ended. The materialist and naturalist inheritance of the Enlightenment made Atheism grow stronger and Deism become gradually perceived as more of a timid compromise for those who could no longer believe in religion but who were not quite ready to abandon God. Although they might have given up on any supernatural beliefs, early nineteenth century Atheists – and still certainly most Atheists today – still abide by some fundamental Christian beliefs. Most of what we call Atheism in the Western world is a secular humanism that inherited the moral values and visions of Christianity and the renewed Greco-Roman culture and knowledge from the Renaissance. Later in the century and, as we will delve deeper into further on, Nietzsche harshly criticised the secularised reconstruction of Christian morality as being completely nonsensical [27].

On the other side of the spectrum, Deism was firmly discredited by Christian revivalist movements who would reaffirm the importance of their religion and its dogmas. After the French Revolution and its Terror, counter-Enlightenment and Romanticism grew stronger as intellectual movements suspicious of science and

industrialisation and reacting to Enlightenment ideas of progress, rationality of all humans, liberal democracy and the increasing secularisation of society. They defended instead an emphasis on emotion and individualism, the idealisation of nature and a glorification of the medieval period. This gave a new breath to Christianity and especially to the Catholic Church whose image was one of a dying dinosaur by the end of the eighteenth century. Although not all romantics turned into convinced Christians, the new spirit turned its back on Enlightenment rationalism and embraced mystery and wonders of which the Church had plenty to offer. Church attendance increased again in the early nineteenth century and Christianity was renewed by its missionary activities in Africa and Asia. With Napoleon Bonaparte, the French Revolution had spread over Europe bringing the start of a new era, but the old order was mostly restored in some countries including France where the Church was rehabilitated by Napoleon [28].

However, the separation between states and the church and the rise of atheism was the beginning of the end for Christianity's hegemony in the Western world. Although the process was neither geographically nor temporally uniform with some countries more reluctant than others to make such radical changes and with the back and forth between radical change and conservative reactions, Christianity gradually lost the great power it had acquired and retained after Constantine the Great's conversion to Christianity. Romanticism had certainly given a new breath to Christianity after the Age of Enlightenment's particularly harsh attacks on the religious institutions, but the ideas coming out of the Enlightenment period would forever change the relationship between society and religion. The threats of heresy for Christianity were no longer merely coming from internal criticism, power or interpretational disputes and diverging practices within and departing from the Church's main dogmas. They were no longer located in specific geographical areas that could be restrained and crushed by the power of the Church. Nor were they merely new Churches certainly threatening the authority of the Supreme institution but still following the main dogmas and so not threatening the foundations of Christianity. Atheism with its associated philosophical and scientific justifications was much worse of a heresy for Christianity than what it had hitherto known since it established its hegemony over pagan lands and faiths in ancient divinities. The nineteenth century saw major scientific discoveries further disturb the Christian faith such as the biologist Charles Darwin's book *The origins of species* published in 1859 which contradicted the Abrahamic religions' Genesis. Medical achievements such as Louis Pasteur's first vaccine against rabies in 1885 also seemed to show that humans could take care of themselves without the need for faith in any kind of deity. Moreover, the Western nineteenth century was a time of turmoil and accelerated change. It started with the end of the first Industrial Revolution and ended with the start of the second one. The Western world was expanding quickly with more urbanisation and great demographic changes, and further military, colonial and imperial conquests over the world. But it was also a time of great clashes within and between countries with more wars, more revolutions, the independence of many Latin American countries, the abolition of slavery, and the rise of representative democracies. Consumerism and individualism continued to increase with capitalism further organising lives, and the political spectrum widened with the rise and clash of many ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism, romanticism, nationalism, anarchism, socialism, communism and social Darwinism. Imperialism and industrialisation brought great wealth and power to some western nations but living conditions were particularly harsh for the working class who struggled to survive with extremely low pay and cruel treatment. In these times of uncertainty, religion was still a reassuring and solid guide through life for many, but as time went by the Church lost its influence, and social movements, trade unions and political parties were new ways for people to take their fate into their own hands [29],[30].

III. Nietzsche – The decline of Christianity and the advent of nihilism

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote about the "death of God" referring to the decline of Christianity's hegemony in the Western world. Although he described himself as a "godless anti-metaphysician", he saw this historical process as having potentially vast and catastrophic consequences with humanity slipping into nihilism. For Nietzsche the Age of Enlightenment's contemporary natural science and its rationalism are the great events that triggered the decline. Science showed that we could remain sceptical about the idea of an afterlife and that the existence of our human species is merely a miniscule part of the cosmos which happened with the accidental processes of evolution. Because Christianity had been the purpose and meaning of life for most of Western humanity for over a millennium – giving reasons for our suffering and great hope in an afterlife – the process invalidating its faith and morals would be too much for humans to deal with, according to the philosopher. Thus, it would destroy the foundations of Western societies and give place to the advent of nihilism [1].

In this part we will try to understand what Nietzsche meant by the advent of nihilism, why the decline of the Church would necessarily lead to it according to him and, as I am writing this pamphlet 140 years after the philosopher's declaration that "God is dead", what can be said of his theory in the early twenty-first century.

1. Defining Nietzsche's view on nihilism

To understand what Nietzsche dreaded with the "death of God", it is important to be clear about what he meant by nihilism. Nihilism can take various forms: epistemological – i.e. knowledge cannot be attained by man or is inexistent –, cosmic – i.e. the cosmos is either hostile or indifferent to humanity –, and moral – i.e. there are no morals or ethics. Nietzsche's warning of the advent of nihilism was of an existential nihilism that includes all of these forms as it is one of a life with no intrinsic meaning or value [2]. Thus, he defined nihilism as a complete lack of any aim with everything losing value, including what one used to value the most ("the highest values devaluate themselves"). For a more radical nihilism he added that one has "the conviction of an absolute un-tenability of existence, we lack the right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be "divine" or morality incarnate." (*Nietzsche (1967)* [3])

Nietzsche defined any belief as "considering-something-true". He used this to explain what he considered to be the most extreme form of nihilism; a view for which "every belief, every considering-something-true is necessarily false because there simply is no true world", "no absolute nature of things, no 'thing-in-itself'". In fact, he argued that because nihilism requires strength to deny a "truthful world", it "might be a *divine way of thinking*" (*Nietzsche (1967)* [4]). Ironically, it can be emphasised that the attachment to an absence of belief or to the falseness of beliefs is also a belief in itself.

Nietzsche defined various manifestations of nihilism throughout his work, which are more subtle than the definitions he usually gives. Indeed because he considers a **perspective to be "nihilistic" if it reduces this earthly world to "nothingness", a lot more than pure nihilism falls into the nihilist categories.**

In Schopenhauer's pessimism and in Buddhism, which follow some ascetic ideals, Nietzsche associated a manifestation **of nihilism as despair**. This detachment from existence as a liberation from suffering for Schopenhauer or from the cycle of aimless drifting in mundane existence for the Buddhists was seen as unnatural for Nietzsche as he believed one should remain faithful to earth.

Because Christianity assures its believers of the possibility of heavenly redemption, Nietzsche saw it as an antidote to the despair of meaninglessness. However, because Christian values involve the belief that this earthly world is aimless, meaningless and valueless without its cosmic attachment, he considered Christianity to be nihilistic (Christians also follow an ascetic ideal). Consequently, he defined Christianity as a form of **masked or disoriented nihilism**. Furthermore, Nietzsche argued that because Christian values and morals rely on the existence of the promised afterlife – understood as a universal "truth" – and because this was bound to be reduced to an invalidated historical interpretation of life as new discoveries were made, Christianity was built as a self-destructive tool. This is the disaster Nietzsche warned us about; not the Church's disappearance as such but rather the agony, suffering and misery that would strike the Western world from this sudden loss of purpose and meaning of life of (Western) humanity which had lasted for more than a millennium.

Although Nietzsche considered Schopenhauerianism, Buddhism and Christianity as manifestations of nihilism, he did take into account their devotions to a certain idea of life; an acknowledgement of the need for higher values. With his depiction of the "last man", Nietzsche presented what he considers to be the worst form of nihilism for which **the highest values have no value at all**. The "last man" is a "conformist mediocre and perfectly happy to be virtually the same as everyone else, […] he finds nothing worthwhile" [5].

Nietzsche also divided nihilism between two states: passive and active. He defined **passive nihilism** as the decline and recession of the power of the spirit. This comes from one's lack of strength to succeed in giving oneself a goal, a reason and a faith. He considered systems built on the ascetic ideal such as Schopenhauerianism, Buddhism and Christianity to be passive nihilisms. Oppositely, he defined **active nihilism** as a sign of increased power of the spirit. The spirit has become so strong that it outgrows its previous goals, convictions and faiths. In this state nihilism does neither only contemplate the futility of life nor does it merely believe that everything deserves to perish, but it reaches a "maximum of relative strength as a violent force of destruction", an active will to destroy [6].

2. Christianity: the holder of values and morals

As previously mentioned, Nietzsche saw in Christianity an antidote to meaninglessness. The Christian moral hypothesis granted humans an absolute value and the promise of a perfect free afterlife that gave meaning to evil and suffering and took one's mind away from one's "smallness and accidental occurrence in the flux of becoming and passing" (*Nietzsche (1967)* [1]). Christian morals "protected life against despair and the leap into nothing, among men and classes who were violated and oppressed by *men:* for it is the experience of being powerless against men, not against nature, that generates the most desperate embitterment against existence." (*Nietzsche (1967)* [2])

However, Nietzsche argued that if the infinite and metaphysical value given to each individual indeed guarded the underprivileged against nihilism, it also placed individuals in an order that did not agree with the worldly order of rank and power. Nietzsche recognised the subversive character of the Christian message and morals but disdained it as being one of the weak and the slave. For him, Christianity misguidedly taught resignation and meekness rather than resistance, boldness, and aggressiveness which he considered as our natural traits. The ascetic ideal is defined as a reaction to the confrontation with nothingness by turning nothingness itself into a goal while providing existential answers. The Christian version of the ascetic ideal set the goal of attaining a "true life" of selfless love by becoming "good" which could only be attained by getting rid of egoism, sexuality, animality, and so on. Nietzsche saw the getting rid of one's "evil" nature as complete hatred and denial of the earthly world and of the humans, animals and material within it. He argued that the **ascetic ideal has made the human being feel "ashamed of all its instincts," indeed "of itself**" (*Nietzsche (1887)* [3]); it has "placed all suffering under the perspective of guilt" (*Nietzsche (1887)* [4]) [5]. He saw Christian morality as an attempt to deny all the characteristics that he associated with a healthy life; the concept of sin makes people

ashamed of their instincts and their sexuality, the concept of faith discourages their curiosity and natural scepticism, and the concept of pity encourages them to value and cherish weakness [6].

Thus, he defined values as "merely a symptom of strength on the part of the value-positers, a simplification for the sake of life", and these values change according to increases in the power of those positing the values **[Note1]**. Because those positing the values are the weak according to Nietzsche, the strong have been prevented from realising their highest potentials, and this has caused society to grow weaker as a whole. Therefore, morality is nothing more than a negation of the will to exist, a driven will to nothingness that we should get rid of. "Our weak, unmanly social concepts of good and evil and their tremendous ascendancy over body and soul have finally weakened all bodies and souls and snapped the self-reliant, independent, unprejudiced men, the pillars of a *strong* civilization" (*Nietzsche (1881) Morality* [7]).

Nietzsche considered that while the ascetic ideal had satisfied the human search for existential questions by giving this earthly world a transcendent purpose, it had reduced the earthly world to nothingness. Because Christianity was not just one interpretation amongst others but *the* interpretation, Nietzsche argued that its invalidation was leaving a complete void of existential meaning; everything had suddenly become pointless. Moreover, because the Christian faith was the justifying foundation of Christian morality, Nietzsche considered morality to be annihilated with faith. He was very contemptuous towards intellectuals attempting a secularised reconstruction of Christian morality, which he considered as incoherent, and self-negating [8].

3. Is the advent of nihilism inevitable or have ideologies succeeded in counterbalancing the decline of Christianity's hegemony?

- **The advent of nihilism**

Nietzsche predicted that the decline of Christianity would lead to the advent of nihilism. He considered, at the time at which he was writing, that European pessimism was still in its early stages. It still lacked the "rigidity of expression in which the Nothing is reflected", and remained too contrived and limited to the spheres of scholars and poets. However, in his thought, pessimism is just a preliminary stage before the advent of nihilism, which will inevitably reach all spheres of society. Nietzsche believed that the untenability of the Westerners' one "true" interpretation of the world would awaken suspicions that all interpretations of the world are false, and that people must have experienced nihilism before they could find out what value their values really had. He considered that the desire to "tout comprendre" (understand everything), which had increased following the Enlightenment period, necessarily builds up tensions within society making extremes appear and become predominant. The logical outcome of this for Nietzsche was that people would discover from what material one has built the "true world" and come to a state of supreme disappointment in which they would be left with nothing else than "the values that pass judgment" (i.e. judging life according to what they feel at the moment). This is the point at which nihilism would be reached making the weak perish, the stronger destroy what does not perish, and the strongest overcome the values that pass judgment **[Note2]** [1].

***Note1**: This point can be linked to the twentieth century philosopher Michel Foucault who was greatly influenced by Nietzsche. He argued similarly that narratives are created by power structures, but, unlike Nietzsche, he considered power to be spread throughout society.*

***Note2:** Nietzsche believed that humanity – or at least its strongest components – should reach the state of overman; a level of self-mastery in which one accepts that all reality is intertwined in a way that one cannot pass judgement on one aspect of reality without passing judgment on all reality, and thus one must accept and embrace reality as it is* [2].

- **New ideologies: mere evanescent Christian heritage or the start of a new era of beliefs?**

In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, atheism continued to grow, scientism and consumerism to thrive, strong ideological clashes and tremendous wars happened, the rest of the world has been further westernised by colonialism and imperialism, and yet the advent of nihilism has still not happened (at least it has not affected society as a whole). Has Nietzsche's prophecy been disproven by the course of history? Have new ideologies and ways of living completely filled the gap left by the decline of Christianity in the Western world?

To answer these questions one must understand what Nietzsche thought about the nature of these ideologies. He argued that the social and psychological forces at the origin of religious belief are the same as those at the origin of liberalism, socialism and utilitarianism under a secularised expression. Because they are too manifestly close to the original, Nietzsche asserted that they depend upon it and because of the belief that the world has no metaphysical structure, these should sooner or later be discredited as well. Instead of replacing Christianity, Nietzsche argued that new ideologies and meta-narratives originated from it and would not play any other role than being part of the gradual process accompanying its decline, and ultimately ending in nihilism. Indeed, Nietzsche claimed that the mechanisms generating humanitarianism and its professed belief in equal respect, equity and "suffrage universel" (universal suffrage) are the same ones that generated Christianity, thus they will be invalidated too [3]. It is in fact the decline of Christianity as the providence of existential meaning and Holy Justice that led people to quickly seek for other meanings not realising that these were directly linked to it. Nietzsche imagined the advent of nihilism as a gradual process in which people would rather attempt to cling to other (related) beliefs before they would inevitability be forced to recognise their true nature. He wrote that with the unlearning of faith, "one still follows old habits and seeks another authority that can speak unconditionally and command goals and tasks" (*Nietzsche (1967)* [4]). In that way Nietzsche drew a set of possibilities of what one could still cling to or aim to reimagine as Christianity declined. Some would attempt to create "a kind of this-worldly solution" promising a paradise on earth such as the Socialists. Some would hold onto the moral ideals without the faith, or others on the "beyond" without the Church. Some would cling to the order of things with no particular other reason than the order in itself, or others to the belief of good and evil as a mere task of the triumph of good and the annihilation of evil. Some would remain detached in contempt for the "natural", the desire and the ego, and finally the weakened Church would still be obtruding in the important experiences of individual lives [5].

Not only did Nietzsche consider that emerging ideologies would not prevent the advent of nihilism but he condemned them in their attempt to fight decadence that he saw "as necessary as any increase and advance of life". Indeed, intending to prevent vice, disease, prostitution and distress was for him a condemnation of life itself. He was particularly hard on socialist-communists that he considered as the product of tyranny of the least and the dumbest. Thus, he considered that:

"One has to eradicate, annihilate, wage war; everywhere the Christian-nihilistic value standard still has to be pulled up and fought under every mask." (*Nietzsche (1967)* [6])

However, both the Christian faith and these newer ideologies and metanarratives are still existent and important in our contemporary times. So how long would it take for the advent of nihilism to happen? Nietzsche talked about the appearance and predominance of extremes following pessimism and preceding nihilism, but the Western twentieth century was a period of time of strong clashing ideologies within and between countries, exacerbated nationalism, warmongering, and struggles for one's rights, and yet, nihilism did not come out of it as a major social event. In times of poverty and exhaustion such as during the Great Depression, nihilism could have grown stronger following despair with people losing hope in the future and a lesser belief in the afterlife. Instead, entire populations turned to desperate fascism on the one hand and hopeful socialist revolutions on the other. In times of great prosperity and consumerism such as in the thirty

years following the Second World War, nihilism could have possibly grown stronger following people's urge to understand everything ("tout comprendre") in more comfortable periods of time. With post-structuralism there were indeed movements deconstructing the "truths" of reality and getting rid of any metaphysical attachment, but it did not necessarily lead its advocates to nihilism and did not make metanarratives and ideologies disappear. Atheism continued to grow but has still very much been attached – for the most part – to social constructions, morals and ideological metanarratives. Religions continued to have many devotees, and spirituality had a renewal away from religious institutions with the New Age movement influenced by the Counterculture of the 1960s. Moreover, the Cold War certainly increased humans' attachment to ideologies with a polarisation between the capitalist and the socialist/communist currents. With the collapse of the USSR, capitalism gained a greater hegemony in the whole world with its ruthless neoliberalism replacing its softer neo-Keynesian form in most of the world [7] [8], and within authoritative state-capitalist forms having emerged from some ex-communist countries such as Russia and China [9] [10]. A hegemony that was far from unanimous of course with the pursuit of traditional leftist movements and the rise of alter-globalisation movements.

- **21st century – age of great polarisations and… nihilism?**

Since then and coming into our contemporary twenty-first century, neo-liberal and state capitalism have continued gaining ground, gradually reducing the social benefits fought for during the twentieth century, further destroying the environment and exploiting lands and people everywhere in the world [11] [12]. Understandings and perspectives of life have been deeply influenced by the dominant discourses and its over present media coverage, but also, to a lesser extent, by other sources of information and the relatively influential power of social movements, intellectuals, politicians and religious institutions.

On the one hand, it can be argued that the combination of consumerism and techno-scientism within capitalism has gradually lulled a large number of people into a passive acceptance devoid of existential questioning and political understanding. Indeed, advertising pushes people into compulsive consumption habits and materialistic goals [13], and social celebrations and traditions, which often used to be opportunities for people to take a break from commercial activities and come together, have been transformed into mass consumption events [14]. People are too often unaware of the socio-ecological realities of their consumption which, overall, has disastrous effects on individuals, societies and the environment [15] [16]. Well-being studies have shown that materialistic tendencies not only have negative effects for people as separate individuals, but also that they can be linked to racism and anti-social behaviour [17]. Regarding techno-scientism, this belief serves to give falsely-depoliticised solutions to the challenges faced by society and reliance on purely scientific answers to the remaining existential questions [18] [19] [20] [21]. Thus one needs neither to take time to understand the reality of these challenges and take political action, nor think about one's existence as more than a mere material individualised experience, i.e. detached from other human beings, other living species and the cycles of nature. On the other hand, with the relative freedom of beliefs and free speech in Western countries and with the propagation of information accelerated by internet and social media, the numbers of different faiths have multiplied. Faiths vary from old religions and their new forms, old and new ideologies and their respective metanarratives, sects, conspiracies, etc., to heterogeneous, often not very coherent mixes of all of them. Added to this, the various crises faced by society are regarded differently within the different sectors of populations who understand and perceive them according to–their different socio-categories, geographical locations, personal relationships, interests and beliefs. Many societies all around the world are increasingly becoming more and more polarised as frustration and anger grow [22]. Thus, constructive discussions within societies frequently become very complicated as these emerging polarisations often give little common ground to base discussions on.

Over the last decades, polarisations (at least in Western capitalist societies) have been exacerbated by the economic crash of 2008 and increasing inequalities. They have been exacerbated by discussions around terrorist attacks and insecurities – on which socialist movements blame imperial wars and inequalities, and nationalist movements blame immigration and lack of authority. They have been exacerbated by climate change and biodiversity destruction –on which many urge governments to act immediately but others want to keep the economy going as usual. They have been exacerbated in the fight of social minorities – for which many are tired of being oppressed and others are frightened of losing their privileges and traditions. More recently, the Covid sanitary crisis has increased the number of conspiracy theories and has been very divisive in societies on top of their traditional divisions [23]. Russia´s invasion of Ukraine – bringing the threats of a nuclear third world war back on the table – has also been a point of divisive tensions in Western societies [24] [25]. The list of cleaving debates is non-exhaustive and the intense fright, frustration and anger people accord to these different subjects crystallises tensions, hatred and violent reactions. Although the polarising subjects are not always homogenously attached to specific social groups, there seem to be some major polarising lines between various social groups.

While this is largely a simplification for the sake of the argument, I would identify four different social poles. One social pole would be **social movements fighting against the status quo and for more freedom and equality** such as: social minorities, tired of being oppressed for who they are or what they believe in, asserting their human rights, people exhausted from living in poverty and not being able to make ends meet, people terrified about climate change and biodiversity destruction, people who would like to experience other ways of living away from the normative consumerist system, etc. Another social pole, again significantly simplified, would be the **strong conservatism** of people reacting to components of the first social pole and **wanting to preserve some aspects of the status quo and generally to go back to a fantasised period of the past** such as: people afraid of losing their nationalist concepts of their country, their binary-cis-hetero-patriarchal values, and – for the Western world – their Judeo-Christian white traditions that they consider threatened by progressivism and mass immigration. A third social pole then would be the **people wanting to pursue the capitalist, individualist, techno-scientist and consumerist status quo** either by clear conviction or by default because it is the main discourse influencing them and they are not very politicised, or because their situation within society does not confront them directly to any such problematic, etc. A fourth social pole might be identified as all the **conspiracy theories and beliefs that originate outside of the political spectrum** but that aim to understand and explain it. **These poles are not hermetic** and one can have progressive, reactionary, status quo and conspiracy positions on different subjects. And the less politically aware people are, the less politically coherent they tend to be. Furthermore, because the functioning of most democracies has little to do with the initial significance of the word – i.e. direct self-governance –, and because of the lack of transparency and concertation in political decisions – to varying degrees according to the country –, distrust and tensions have increased between the different poles and between people and the institutions [26].

Now this brings us back to Nietzsche and his advent of nihilism supposedly following the appearance and predominance of extremes within society. When this happened during the twentieth century we saw that it broke out into two world wars and was finally followed by economic prosperity in the Western world (and elsewhere). The focus on material conditions – whether making ends meet or enjoying consumerism – or on great war enemies has seemed to have diverged people's focus away from questions about their existence. According to Nietzsche, the division of society out of the Christian hegemony was supposed to bring societies to nihilism. Instead, it seems to have resulted in further attachments to religions and ideologies. In the twenty-first century, not only are many populations increasingly polarised, but on top of that societies and "modern civilisation" are threatened by nuclear perils renewed with international tensions and by the acceleration of the human-caused degradation of the environment; more places are becoming unliveable, resource scarcities are increasing, and there will be more violent conflicts and mass migration [27]. The combination of great social polarisations, the rise of nationalisms and the increasing nuclear and climatic threats to our societies do not seem very promising for humans to come together and find sensible collective solutions to these problems.

Could the conjuncture of all of these menaces be an accelerating process to the implosion of societies and the advent of nihilism?

Our individual beliefs might still be too strong to imagine that most people would gradually become nihilists. One could possibly imagine it happening a few decades from now; in a scenario in which our civilisation ends up massively reduced by environmental disasters and wars, and transformed into small survivalist groups having lost all faith in any existential explanations. As Nietzsche did not give a time period to his theory I guess we could still give it the benefit of the doubt.

On another level, we could consider Nietzsche's advent of nihilism as one of societal nihilism. Indeed, rather than being a process of individual people massively becoming nihilists which would provoke the crumbling of societies' foundations, we could understand the advent of nihilism as how these societies could become – or are becoming – intrinsically nihilist. Indeed, a society could be considered nihilist if it comes to be multiply polarised and that the beliefs dividing its people get so strong and incompatible to the point that it is left with *no common ground to share.* History has shown that strongly bipolarised societies have often led to civil wars and then either one pole imposed itself on the other or the society collapsed into two distinct societies. But if a society is multiply polarised in a conjuncture of incompatible beliefs and no common ethical or moral agreements, could it not be considered to have reached nihilism as a whole and be on the verge of collapsing? With the decline of Christianity's hegemony in the western world, Nietzsche suggested not only that people would lose all sense of meaning but also that societies would be left with no common morals. Over the last decades, rapid societal changes seem to have increased clashes between ideologies and both the constant emergence and distortion of new words, concepts and ideas have created strong senses of confusion, fears and frustrations amongst people. If societies continue to evolve in incompatible polarising directions, they will probably collapse one after the other, and some groups will crush or impose themselves on others while others will try to cooperate. It would be the end of the current civilisation and a new page in human history.

Whether these scenarios happen or not depends on societies' willingness to fight against these polarisations and find unifying factors to rebuild a sense of community and societies on. Some believe that one dominant understanding of the world should prevail in order for people to be able to come together. However, others criticise this view for having to rely on a hierarchical oppressive structure imposing it so that it would go against the free evolving nature of life and would be completely counterproductive and violent. Western states have long been strongly criticised for imposing their systems of oppression everywhere in the world especially through colonialism, coloniality and imperialism. In opposition to this, the idea of the *pluriverse* defends the right for multiple cosmo-visions to peacefully co-exist or, as the Zapatista National Liberation Army put it in their 'Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle' (1996): "a world in which many worlds fit" [28]. But in order to prevent societies from breaking into structural nihilism and violence, these worlds will have to agree on some societal fundamentals based on human rights and the rights of nature. The next part will look into the importance of spirituality to enable humans to reconnect with each other and their ecosystems in order to be able to define some common values on which societies can rely and work together.

IV. Further discussions - The importance of spirituality

1. Defining spirituality and why it is important

To understand what I mean by "the importance of spirituality" it is necessary to make sure we agree on the same definition of spirituality. Many people would understand spirituality as the "sensitivity or attachment to religious values" which is one of the main definitions given by the Merriam Webster dictionary. Coming from the Latin *spiritualitas*, the term was used in the Western world within early Christianity to refer to a life oriented towards the Holy Spirit. The term from the fifteenth century then came to be used to mean "something that in ecclesiastical law belongs to the church or to a cleric as such". The Western understanding of spirituality has been indissociably religious and more precisely indissociably Christian from its first use, and it is still very tied to religion for most people. However, broader definitions have been given to spirituality from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1999, Canda and Furman – scholars in spirituality and social work – defined spirituality as "a universal and fundamental aspect of what it is to be human – to search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and moral frameworks for relating with self, others, and the ultimate reality". They defined it as a "universal quality of human nature [that] is not the property of any religion and need not express through any religious context." And they defined religion as "an institutionalized pattern of beliefs, behaviours, and experiences, oriented toward spiritual concerns, and shared by a community and transmitted over time in traditions" (*Canda and Furman (1999)* [1]). This broader definition of spirituality is what I define as important because I believe that the understanding of oneself – not just as a distinct individual but rather – as part of a grander universal whole can help one to better relate to their natural environment and its cyclical character, and be more empathic towards their fellow humans and the rest of-living beings.

From the scientific revolution and with the ideologies growing from the enlightenment's rationalism, not only came the decline of Christianity in the Western world, but also a sceptical stance to , and then even a frontal rejection of, any form of religion and also – because it has often been understood as inseparable from the latter - of spirituality as a whole. Many socialist movements have had some of the most vigorous anti-religious discourses. Of the most notable statements, we can cite Marx defining "religion [as] the opium of the masses" and the famous anarchist phrase "no gods, nor masters" made famous by Blanqui. Although these were strong attacks against religion's blinding authority – blinding because it is considered not to fix but distract from the underlying causes of people's pain and suffering, and authority because of its hypothetical divine nature serving to justify its hierarchical and oppressive structure –, they were not necessarily aimed against faith itself nor against spirituality [2]. But the understanding of spirituality as indivisible from religion and as being a "distracting authority", coupled with scientism and materialism must certainly have been important factors in the Western increase of atheism [3] [4] and materially led lives [5]. Unfortunately, this rejection of spirituality (again, understood as a deeper feeling of connection to everything) and embrace of materialism has been detrimental to individuals and societies. Indeed, many studies have observed correlations between materialism, a lack of empathy and engagement with others, and unhappiness [6] [7].

Although Western atheism rose with rationalism and materialism, some reflections reacting to the development of scientific rationalism have matured since the Age of Enlightenment emphasizing the importance of spirituality and the fact that it does not have to be associated with religion. New Age movements from the 1960s onwards have picked up on this "spiritual-but-not-religious" heritage at a time of status quo dissidence and the rise of new counter-culture movements. The political transformation from the New Age movements has been very varied with many being associated to the hippie subculture but actually being very diverse ranging from far right and conservative through to liberal, socialist, and libertarian [8]. Although New Age has succeeded in making spirituality rise again in the Western world outside the rigidity of religious institutions and over purely materialistic lifegoals, criticism can be made on the limits of the movement to completely surpass individualism and intolerance. Moreover, the embracing of the freedom of spirituality without the need of religion has also quickly transformed into a binary position in which spirituality-out-of-religion has been seen as transcending history, culture and ideological interpretation and, thus, considered superior to religious spirituality, itself seen as a backward and anachronist attachment [9]. However, the problem of this understanding – beyond the fact that it is condescending and disrespectful towards religious people – is that the term "spirituality" itself is a Euro-Christian construct tied to its history and bounded

territories. Adopting a Foucauldian discourse analysis of spirituality, Carrette and King examined how the overarching contemporary definition of spirituality set up power relations that mask "the specific historical location of each use of the term" and how it "functions in different ways at different times and reflects a specific ordering of social relations" (*Carrete and King (2005)* [10]). Furthermore, Edward Said in *Orientalism* showed how 'colonial authority' is established by generating structures of thinking in binary opposition. By being seen as religious before spiritual, ethnic minorities come to be disfavoured by the "spiritual-religion" binary [11]. For many people from different historical-cultural contexts, the separation of spirituality and religion does not make much sense. Furthermore, I believe it is a fundamental mistake to take a moral stance over others' ways of expressing their spirituality and that it goes, once again, in complete opposition with the message of openness and tolerance that should be carried with spirituality. Egocentric and individualist traits have particularly been developed in the Western world through humanism and Descartes' *Cogito Ergo Sum* ("I think therefore I am"), and reinforced by centuries of religious crusades, "civilizational" colonialism and soft and hard power imperialism over the rest of the world. Because of this, Westerners have often expressed – and sometimes **still** express – feelings of moral superiority erroneously legitimising their understanding of the world over those coming from other cultures. Whether it be for spirituality or for any form of belief whatsoever, it is important that practitioners adopt a self-critical approach in which they question how knowledge is generated and how relations of power operate in this process [12]. It goes without saying that the level of spirituality of a person or an organisation is not necessarily correlated to how much these bring it to the fore (sometimes it even seems inversely correlated). According to the definition of spirituality I have given, it would hardly be compatible for someone to be both completely spiritual and materialistic or individualistic. Because humans, in their complexity and contradictions, are never 100% of something, someone can both have some spiritual and some materialistic tendencies. However, I understand people attempting to follow a "spiritual path" as trying to face their contradictions and being "more spiritual" in the sense of being "less materialistic", "less individualistic", "more deeply connected" and "more empathetic". There is no "spiritual diploma" of course, people constantly evolve (in one direction or another) and no one can quantify how "spiritual" someone is. Nevertheless, I argue here that the increasing inclusion and respect for spirituality and its various forms in Western reflection remains positive and encouraging as it enables a distancing from pure materialism and techno-scientism, as well as increased recognition of the perspectives, understandings, wisdom, and knowledge of marginalised populations, indigenous minorities and non-Western cultures [13].

2. Christianity, power and spirituality

• An anarchist critique of authority and power

After having analysed the decline in Christianity's hegemony and its supposedly nihilist consequence and now that I have given the definition of "spirituality" referred to in this pamphlet, I would like to look into the greater effects this massive long-ruling and powerful religion has had on its spirituality and on Western spirituality as a whole. History has shown how this believed-to-be divinely founded institution ruled by human beings has grown bigger and bigger with hierarchical networks of bishops – over which the Pope (the bishop of Rome) claims authority –, going on missionary missions, establishing political controls, constructing places of worships and places of education and organising military campaigns [1].

In the nineteenth century, anarchism arose, from and within the larger socialist movements, as a critique of the principle of authority and its negative effect on society. Mostly understood as a critique of the state, anarchism's critique of authority is actually broader and can be applied to authority's relations within any type of institution. It criticises authority on the basis that, ultimately, it serves primarily the interests of those who possess it (the privileged) at the expense of those who do not. From this unequal situation, conflicts of interest are created and this results in various forms of inefficiencies and irrationalities such as distorted information flows and perverse incentives [2].

A critique of authority and power can be applied to the Christian religion since it was made the official religion of the Roman Empire and established its position of authority by legitimising it with the belief in its divine character. The Roman Emperor was given further legitimacy to rule by Christianity's divine approval and Christianity welcomed the protection and sponsorship of the ruler. It was a win-win for the autocrats and for the religious institutions, but one can wonder if it was coherent with Jesus' spiritual message. The sociologist,

theologian and Christian anarchist Jacques Ellul argued, in his book *Anarchy and Christianity*, that "there is in the Bible the orientation to a certain anarchism" – the latter understood "as the fullest and most serious form of socialism" (*Ellul (1988)* [3a]). The anarchist philosopher Murray Bookchin also considered that the origin of Christianity was in anarchist thinking. Ellul added that in keeping with the biblical Word there should not have been any official declarations, organised hierarchy, institutional authority and judicial system [3]. These of course are personal interpretations to the Bible that one does not need to agree with but one can also question whether the Christian rise to power was beneficial to the authentic transmission of Jesus' spiritual message or not. History seems to show us the opposite. Official Christian institutions – mainly the Catholic Church for a long period of time in the Western world – have used their divine authority to force their beliefs on people causing great massacres and sometimes slowing down philosophical and scientific progress, and to corrupt the initial spiritual message of their faith by abusing their power and wealth for their own benefit. The Church's supreme authority has enabled it to keep a certain amount of control over populations for more than a millennium but one can wonder what is left of spirituality in religion when people follow it through fear and coercion. Of course, as Ellul concedes, there have been Christians who have discovered the simple biblical truth in every century [3c]. "Heretics" have repeatedly tried to go back to the original spiritual message and live in harmony, but the supreme institutions have massacred them time and time again until the spread of information increased and diverging power interests appeared. In part II, I have analysed the external factors causing the decline of Christianity's hegemony, but I believe it is important to realise that by ignoring and condemning diverging opinions, revolts and the development of knowledge, and by corrupting its initial message, Christian institutions carry the biggest responsibility. During the Middle Ages and up to the Age of Enlightenment through the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, most intellectuals and common people did not want an end to Christianity and certainly not the "death of God". The conflict of interest that appeared between Christian populations and their institutions and representatives were not about the Christian faith, but about the abuses of power distorting it and subduing the masses into serfdom and misery. What one would imagine that most people wanted was for the spiritual message to be truly delivered – i.e. to live in peace, freedom and equality – and for the Church to be deemed worthy of delivering it. Furthermore, by choosing to impose its dogmas by coercion rather than by merely relying on the power of its message and on the example of spiritually led lives, Christianity not only brought about its decline as an institutionalised religion but also – and more dramatically – it brought a decline of spirituality within itself and across Western societies. By becoming institutionalised and attached to rigid or even manipulative interpretations of its holy scriptures and by acquiring positions of power corrupting its message and forcing it onto people, it has also led many of its devoted believers to use it in the name of intolerance. Some extreme right movements base their existence on fantasised ideas of a white feudalist Middle Ages in which Christianity was glorious with its order and respect for traditions. However, as one of their political mentors put it: "that which in Catholicism has a truly traditional character is not typically Christian and that which in Catholicism is specifically Christian can hardly be considered traditional" [4] . The strong appeal of Western extreme right movements for their white Christian identities is not only based on an erroneous racist idea of an impervious 'white only' Middle Ages [5] [6] [7], but also on a distorted understanding on the fundamentals of Christianity based on the ruthlessness of its medieval institutions.

- **Back to spirituality, love and compassion?**

Although Christianity has lost its hegemony in the western world, it still has many devotees in the West and remains the world's largest religious group with 2.3 billion people according to the Pew Research Centre [8]. Moreover, even though its position of power and the rigidity of its dogmas (such as priest celibacy in the Catholic Church) have led and leads many of its representatives to acts of corruption or abuse, spirituality has never completely left Christianity as a whole. Many of its devotees and representatives have highly referred to their Christian spirituality to do what they regarded as good; whether by empathising and taking care of others, by using their faith as a guide to improve research and knowledge for the greater good, or by denouncing corruption and coercion when need be. In the Middle Ages, many priests supported the medieval heretic movements and during the Renaissance many Christians firmly criticised the Church's authority. The Protestant reformation originated from a critique of Church corruption and a return to the spiritual message of the Holy Scriptures. In the sixteenth century, an important moral debate took place in Valladolid about the rights and treatment of indigenous people in the Americas. The strong colonial Spanish state and its prominent humanist scholar Sepúlveda claimed that the indigenous were barbarians and should be forcibly converted to Christianity and subjected to Spanish overlords. Although some priests sided with Sepúlveda, many Catholics including the

Franciscan and Dominican orders condemned the violence perpetuated by Spanish soldiers and the prominent Dominican Las Casas argued for ending the horrendous treatment of natives and to grant them the same rights as the colonisers [9]. Many intellectuals from the scientific revolution and the age of Enlightenment were devoted Christians, and, closer to our modern era, many charities have originated from the Christian faith.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the separation of church and state and the freedom of religion not only benefited individuals, communities and faithful minorities but actually ended up benefiting Christianity too. It allowed Christian institutions to gradually be un-blinded by their hegemonic power position and freed from their social-organising vocation. Moreover, it enabled them to refocus on their initial spiritual message and to gradually reclaim the sociologically disruptive role Christianity had in its beginnings when the (at least Western) hegemonic values were of power and dominance. People could go back to the initial message and have more choice in whether to adhere to Christianity or not; thus making the Christians of today probably more soundly Christian than the coercively converted ex-pagan Christian of the Middle Ages. The return to the core message of Christianity defending the oppressed gave rise to the Latin American Liberation Theology movement in the mid-twentieth century. This movement, which began within the Roman Catholic Church, combines Christian principles with political activism as a synthesis of Christian theology and Marxist socio-economic principles. The use of the church to promote social change via the political arena emphasises liberation for oppressed peoples and attempts to reduce or eliminate social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. It does so by focusing on their immediate causes, by involving the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed, and by relating to the liberation from selfishness and sin and to the relationship between God and people. Although it began as a moral reaction against poverty caused by social injustice in Latin America, Liberation theology grew as an international movement discussing theology from the point of view of the poor and the oppressed. It includes many churches and denominations – such as Jewish liberation or Black liberation philosophy –, and engendered the movement of Feminist theology in Europe and North America. [10a].

Finally, the current Catholic head of Church, Pope Francis, has given an significant progressive turn to the Catholic Church. He is the first Pope coming from the American continent and from a philosophy influenced by Liberation theology [10b]. Pope Francis firmly denounced the economic systems as "an economy of exclusion and inequality, […] an economy [that] kills" [11]. He condemned homophobia (or at least endorsed tolerance to homosexuality), disapproved of patriarchy by asserting the importance of women and of their role in the Church, and refuted the Church's ban on contraception. He supported the need of religious unity, asserted that evolution and creation are not mutually exclusive, denounced lust for power within the Church, and overall he called on the Church to adapt to the changing conditions of the world; prioritising acceptance and forgiveness over traditionalist mentalities [12]. Indeed, it can be argued that it is Pope Francis' position of power as head of the Church that enabled such a progressive turn of the Church from its very conservative rigour. And that without a progressive change from the top it would have been much harder and slower to bring about changes in such a hierarchical institution without any further divisions. However, it is important to note that a Church is not much without its believers and with an evolution of societies without the Church, it could only have crumbled further. It is also noteworthy that Pope Francis claims he did not want to be Pope [13], he did not want to be in this position of power and this is precisely what enables him to be a better Pope. With the Reformation, Protestant Churches took an earlier progressive turn compared to their Catholic counterparts, with clerical marriage for example [14]. The Reformation was supposed to have enabled ordaining women ministers. While very few actually did it from the start such as it appears to be the case of the Apostolic Johannite Church [15], most Protestant Churches only changed their rules to allow it from the 1950s following the evolution of public opinion about women's role in society [16]. Following an anarchist standpoint (that can be understood as the more horizontal the better [17]), the fact that Protestant Churches are made up of tens of thousands of different denominations around the world – rather than one hierarchical structure for the Catholic Church – seems more favourable for these denominations to adapt more quickly and correspond better to the beliefs of their religious communities. Regarding the Catholic Church's strong hierarchy, it seems that only the Pope could bring about rapid strong changes to it. Yet, the limits of progression through power are circumscribed by the limits of progression within the person holding the power and by the pressure exerted by his immediate subordinates and other powerful people within the institution. Although he has made many progressive advances, the Pope still condemns euthanasia and abortion. He does though call for "forgiveness" to those who have committed abortion, but continues to condemn it and has recently said he respects the US Supreme court decision that allows US States to ban abortion again [18]. Thus the Pope still chooses to prioritise the Christian idea of life over direct empathy for the ones suffering. I believe that this is a dramatic mistake because as much as it is important to value life over materialism, consumerism, exploitations and

experimentations, I have the profound conviction that the value given to life should remain within the empathising of one's suffering, i.e. empathy for the already-existing woman's suffering should prevail over the unborn foetus

Within the many Christian movements in the world today, some have chosen rather to focus on their untouchable traditions and dogmas falling into intolerance and losing their spiritual core, and others have chosen rather to focus on the spiritual message of love and compassion. I personally consider that religion can serve as a helpful guide and strong community for some and that all faiths should be respected (as far as they do not preach intolerance), but that what matters most of all is spirituality itself – whether it be through or without any specific religion. If Christianity survives through history, it will most likely be through those who put its spiritual love and compassion before its dogmas.

3. The significance of spirituality and its essential association with ideological, philosophical and political reflections

- **Socio-egalitarian movements' views on religion and spirituality**

Socio-egalitarian activists and revolutionaries have long been fighting for egalitarian and socialist goals that they defend as the most realistic strategies to a forthcoming world of love and peace. Within some of their social spheres, there is an ongoing criticism of spirituality and religion's focus centred on individual change and/or impeding structural change. Religions with their set of principles and rules to follow intend to improve society by encouraging individuals to adopt ethical and moral behaviour. The understandings and interpretations of these rules can however alter their initial purposes, and the rigidity of some rules induced by the untouchable Holy character of their scriptures can make them appear archaic and instead lead to intolerant behaviour. Spiritually inclined people – whether attached to specific dogmas or not – often focus on their individual experience and transformative potential enabling them to be more at peace with themselves and with society and the environment as a whole. Even though religious and non-religious spirituality is certainly beneficial to individuals' well-being [1] [2], some thinkers such as the functionalists Malinowski and Parsons have argued that religion prevents social change by helping individuals and society to cope with disruptive events that might threaten the existing social order. Marx believed that religions helped to preserve the existing class structure and that beliefs served to justify the existing unequal social order thus preventing social change from happening [3]. Others might not go as far as saying that spiritual beliefs serve to "justify" the existing order, but that they certainly encourage one to accept the status quo as it is, thus discouraging any sense of political indignation and action. Moreover believing change might come through one's faith or relying on one's individual actions to bring about change can divert spiritually inclined people from understanding and acting against the structural natures of inequalities, oppressions, environmental destructions, etc.

However, there are also arguments in favour of religion causing or participating in social change. To start with, the Christian concept of *hope* is a reformulation of Jewish messianism; a religious devotion to an ideal or cause that broke with the Ancient Greek understanding of the eternal recurrence of time and the passive acceptance of one's predetermined destiny. The modern idea of *progress* originating from the Age of Enlightenment – especially with the philosopher Condorcet – appears to be a transformed secularised translation of the Christian concept of *hope* [4]. The philosopher Eric Voegelin argued that modern politics are enrooted "in a secularised promise of a salvation on Earth" [5]. The socialist Max Weber argued that the social norms instilled by Protestantism laid the foundations for modern capitalism (which was a radical progressive transformation at the time considering the old feudalist system). Moreover, the Protestant reformation itself, and the Christian heretical movements before it, were radical movements within Christianity that relied on Biblical scriptures and on their discontent towards the main religious order to actively bring about social and religious change. More recently, in the 1960s, the reverend Martin Luther King and the broader Baptist Church played a major role in the American Civil Rights movements; Luther King who was himself encouraged by Mahatma Gandhi's religiously inspired movement for India's independence from British rule [6] ***Note***. As we have seen in the part on Christianity and power, Liberation theology brought a great synthesis of Christian spirituality and political action, and influenced a very progressive Pope. From the 1950s, engaged Buddhism also emerged to apply Buddhist ethics and insights acquired from meditation practice to social, political and environmental understandings of contemporary situations. Although in Buddhism the main focus of change lies within oneself,

the Nobel peace prize and Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh explained that "meditation is about the awareness of what is going on – not only in your body and in your feelings, but all around you." Engaged Buddhists view their activism as part of their meditation and mindfulness practice, not apart from it [7]. There are certainly many more examples to give from many spiritual movements and religions that rely on their faith to engender social change.

Note: Both Gandhi's and Luther King's actions and movements guided by their religious faith were essential in their respective fights. Yet, and to be duly noted, the point here is not to favour nonviolent figures or movements over violent ones, but merely to give only a few examples of how religious or spiritual faiths can also be drivers for social change. It is important not to forget nor diminish the importance of other more radical (and less pacific) revolutionaries in these fights that also played essential roles and are often less acknowledged such as Chandra Shekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh for the independence of India and members of the Black Panther Party and Malcom X for the US Civil Rights Movement.

- **Philosophical and political grids to understand the world**

Outside (or beside) the spheres of spirituality and religion, political and philosophical reflections and socio-political theories have given people grids to understand the structures of politico-economical systems and tools to deepen existential questions. The Age of Enlightenment gave a fresh start to the Western modern era with the propagation of new philosophical and political understandings enabling people to further reflect on the system in which they live and the type of life they could lead. Modern period intellectuals started to deconstruct "reality" showing how much more complex it is than previous understandings and knowledge made it seem. With research in social and natural sciences going further, people were convinced that we would always acquire better understandings of reality and get closer to its fundamental truths. Mainstream tendencies in Western populations went from social acceptance of suffering while waiting for the afterlife to expectations of reaching another better life during their lifetime on earth. By acquiring more understandings on the underlying power structures and social mechanisms within the politico-economical systems, people have been empowered to stand up for their rights and to expand their possibilities and choices in life. Of course, these enabled great social transformations, but they also gave rise to many different ideological metanarratives built on the conviction that humanity was following a universal linear evolution towards fundamental truths and its better self. With scientific and technological advances but also with philosophical and political developments, societies have been massively transformed for the better and for the worse. Understandings of history as a universal linear quest to one improved society approaching "*the* truth" of human existences have been problematic – to say the least. They have been problematic because of all the different meanings "improved" can be associated with, and because these unquestioned concepts of advances and developments have not always been beneficial – or even have often had disastrous effects – for humans and the rest of living beings, and have often been imposed upon them.

Mid-twentieth century postmodernist and poststructuralist movements – of which Nietzsche was one of the major early influences –, have gone further in deconstructing perceptions of reality. They considered everything to be an illusion, i.e. the perception of the world and the world itself. Because we – humans – would have no guarantees that our discoveries would be nothing more than mere perceptions, nothing could really get us closer to knowing "the truth". Thus, for them, people should rather choose to live a life they would desire unbounded from any moral limits rather than a "meaningful" one, because they believe that there is no such thing as a universal fundamental meaning [8] [9]. In a similar way to atheism taking a stance from religious beliefs, post-structuralism took a stance from ideological beliefs. As any understanding of reality can be deconstructed, one is further empowered to live any kind of life one would wish for, freed both from any normative constructs and from the eternal quest to a meaning. Thus, again, as atheism asserted a belief in the non-existence of any metaphysical reality, post-structuralism asserted a belief in the non-existence of "reality" as such. Yet, if anything – including any kind of morals – can be deconstructed in no underlying reality, then one can choose to live with no consideration whatsoever for others. So, if these movements have indeed furthered individuals' potentials to self-empowerment, they have also opened more doors to Nietzsche's nihilist nightmare, to purely hedonist and selfish lifestyles, and to the possibility of selectively deconstructing anything, thus widening the gap between different understandings of the world.

- **More tolerance and more empathy in socio-egalitarian fights**

However, as previously mentioned, political and philosophical reflections and scientific discoveries *have* furthered understandings and different possibilities of existence. They *have* broken established norms and beliefs that have been legitimising different systems of oppression for centuries or even millennia. Today it is clear – for most progressives at least – that any reactionary understanding is an intolerant postulate affirming that everyone should conform to that understanding or cease to exist in the same societal context. Conservatism or reactionaryism are merely disguised forms of intolerance based on established ideas of what life should be like, how people should behave in it, and who should or should not be allowed existence in the different spheres of society. The intolerant stance of these norms and beliefs having been unmasked, I argue that they must firmly be denounced, and that we should stick to the understanding that if there is only one thing one must be intolerant to is to intolerance itself – and this includes any form of violence too, whether physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, etc. For the purpose of my argumentation, I will attribute the number *1* to a primal intolerance – the one directed to any other ways of being, doing, living, etc. (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc.) –, and the number *2* to an intolerance reacting to the first one (e.g. anti-racism, feminism, etc.). For example, not tolerating *(2)* a sexist joke *(1)* or a racist conduct *(1)* is fundamental for a society to grow out of its inherent intolerances *(1)* as these impede total equality and freedom for all. Therefore, it is essential to be intolerant *(2)* to these intolerant behaviours *(1)* and to affirm this intolerance *(2)* loudly and vigorously. However, I believe it is also important to affirm it *(2)* cautiously, reflexively, strategically, pedagogically and empathetically. Indeed, it is important to try to understand the reasons underlying one's primal intolerance. These can include ignorance, mimetic behaviours, learned intolerant beliefs, etc. Moreover, I consider that it is necessary to detach the intolerant behaviour *(1)* from the entirety and complexity of the human being associated with it – this without, of course, exempting the individual's responsibility in (re)producing this intolerance *(1)*, but rather by recognising that it does not define that person as a whole. By being both firmly and cautiously intolerant *(2)* to the intolerance *(1)* rather than to the person producing this intolerance *(1)*, the reacting person *(2)* has a better chance of making their point without the intolerant person *(1)* feeling personally rejected and becoming tense, frustrated, angry and more strongly committed to their intolerance *(1)*.

Battle after battle, progressive movements have strongly asserted peoples' rights to be as they are and live as they wish. They have done so in all societies, no matter the extent to which these can sometimes be engrained into normative understandings and reluctance to change. However, because of how exhausting it can be to constantly experience oppression, because of how arduous and slow it can be to make societies change, or because of the social progressive bubbles in which they sometimes live in, some progressive-minded people, activists, and academics can grow frustrated, angry and intolerant towards people instead of towards intolerant ideas *(1)*. For example instead of being intolerant *(2)* to someone's sexist or racist behaviour *(1)*, one can become intolerant to that person as a whole; casting the latter away with a sexist or racist label. However, that person could have had this behaviour without any further thinking or because of a misled assumption from external information or a personal experience. Maybe just an explanation of why this behaviour was sexist or racist – and thus unacceptable – could have been sufficient for the person to think it through and come to reject it instead of feeling personally attacked and possibly becoming more intolerant. Another example on a wider scale, instead of merely being intolerant *(2)* to patriarchal values *(1)* within a religion, one can become intolerant to its priests or believers. Not only would that be very reductive of the great complexity of that religion and its communities, but it would also push many of its members to withdraw into their religious communities and grow feelings of resentment and (further) intolerance.

Of course, feelings of frustration and anger are understandable and often legitimate. It is certain that having to bear oppressive and intolerant behaviour day after day can be absolutely exhausting, discouraging and very traumatic. Thus, one will not always have the energy or the patience to discuss calmly with an intolerant-minded person – especially when the latter is very narrow-minded and aggressive. Moreover, I must acknowledge that my social positioning as a white middle-class Western male certainly makes it easier for me to call for tolerance when I am not myself victim of social oppressions (easier to call for it but certainly not making me any better at it). My call in asserting the importance of primal *tolerance* is certainly not one to undermine the legitimacy of the feelings of frustration and anger of people fighting against their oppressions, or to undermine their achievements. It is rather to argue that (1) engrained and excessive feelings of frustration, anger and intolerance are negative for oneself [10] [11], (2) that communicating with anger and directing intolerance towards people is counter-productive, and (3) that transforming legitimate feelings of

frustration and anger into intolerance towards people will lead societies to further polarisation, to more intolerance and violence, and to turning into extremely heterogeneous "non-societies". Far right movements are growing with ignorance, fake-news and distorted understanding of "woke-ism" [12]. On top of that, some very radical speeches and actions of some progressives are so vehement and militantly elaborated that people can be shocked and afraid by them, completely misunderstand them and be hostile to them as a result. Some people feel insulted and personally attacked without having been able to understand the criticism of the underlying power and oppressive structures in their beliefs. Even worse, I have witnessed some labelled "progressive" people express blatant hatred and disdain towards specific groups of people in the name of their fight. Although "progressives" expressing – or being misinterpreted as expressing – intolerance are not the main reason for the far right movements' growth (which is rather feeding on people's anger, confusion and ignorance), fascists can only be reinforced by it. Thus, – again – although fighting against oppressions and primal intolerant behaviours can often be exhausting, discouraging and traumatic; I would argue that the fight for social progression should come **with** *primal tolerance* **as much as it is humanly possible.** This, of course, implies not to take a superior condescending stance over people when they express hatred and human-directed intolerance out of their personal experience or positionality. Instead, it implies to intend taking awareness personally about one's own developed hatred and intolerances. It also implies to give support, consideration and understanding to a person fighting oppression and intolerance and falling in the trap of intolerance as a result. And, when possible, one can intend to give friendly personal advice (and not "universal" instructions) on the situation – as to how that person could feel both more at peace and reinforced during a conflictual situation. With the association between progressivism and primal tolerance, my point is to argue in favour of how important it is to intend not to ridicule and belittle individuals with preconceived or normative ideas, and to avoid fuelling one's legitimate anger into hatred and intolerance to people. I do not think that doing so could bring more to someone than a mere (and brief) sensation of personal satisfactory revenge. In order to deconstruct and surpass primal intolerances and systems of oppressions inherent to old orders and status quos, would it not be more fruitful and appeasing to consider humans through their complex understandings as social individuals and members of various communities and societies? And would it not be better to look into their personal life-experience, cognitive abilities and sense of empathy to make them understand and relate to the suffering caused by systemic oppression and to the active role of their primal intolerant behaviours in it?

Rationalism has preceded Western understandings that everything can be deconstructed, that people have the right to flourish as individuals and as members of their societies, and that anything impeding them from that right is nothing else than oppressive social constructions. However, it has also distanced Westerners from the idea of spirituality as the understanding of their lives being all connected together and to a great whole, to transcending their established beliefs, to empathising with other living beings and with life itself. People are not just their ideas. They are the complex stories that have led them to understand and perceive life in a certain way. They are sentient beings that love and suffer, and seek happiness – whatever it is they understand by it. Thus, I believe that people's lives and fights for the freedom to exist, live and flourish equally - and so to prevent societies from polarising any further - can benefit from more understanding, consideration, empathy, and thus more spirituality.

- **Less ego and binary, and more listening and empathy**

Another important benefit of spirituality within philosophical and political reflections and debates is how it can help people distance their reflections and disagreements-with-their-reflections from their ego. As I have previously mentioned in the part defining spirituality, Western individualism and egocentrism are rooted in Western philosophical reflections. Humanism emphasises the individual and the social potential and agency of human beings. Descartes' *Cogito Ergo Sum* ("I think therefore I am") emphasises the *ego* which means "I" in Latin, and thus places the purpose of life in knowing the true nature of one's "I" or "Self". Historically, the understanding of oneself as a separable entity from the rest of society enabled people to gain independence and autonomy, and to emancipate themselves from the dominant norms by affirming their rights, choices and preferences. However, an excess of individualism and the deviation from one's individual freedom to egocentrism have led many to neglect their nurturing from, and interdependence on, their societies and ecosystems. Moreover, the ego is divisive and dualistic; it places a clear separation between the "I" and the "you". This duality or binary way of understanding life is very important in the Western world. Because of Western crusades, "civilizational" colonialism and soft and hard power imperialism over the rest of the world,

the West has both comforted this understanding in itself and propagated it in the rest of the world – although it does not have hegemony everywhere with other understandings of life still acting as strong counter-powers to it. With an important attachment to the ego and individuality, We-sterners seem to have a tendency to rapidly take grand moral stances, to take arguments very personally and to adopt conflictual positions. When two people argue, they could start by searching for what unites them and what they can agree on before understanding where and why the two diverge. Instead, it is more likely for these two people to jump to conclusions, prepare their argument rather than listen, harshly criticise one another – often with very little actual understanding of the other –, to get frustrated, contemptuous or angry and to avoid or refuse any further discussion. The omnipresence of egos in political and philosophical reflections is a constant myriad of ruptures in the progression of ideas and in the advancement of societies as actual societies, i.e. voluntary associations of individuals for common ends.

Taking a spiritual stance can help one recognise one's ego's presence and aim to put it aside as much as possible. This may not – and probably will not – completely succeed in all circumstances and at all times, but attempting to take a spiritual path may help us approach it. Identifying one's ego and its associated feelings and reactions to certain statements or in certain discussions can help one to disassociate words and ideas from the person saying them; to feel less frustration and anger towards that person, and thus succeed in remaining relatively calm in a discussion and able to continue to raise some arguments if need be. It can also help one to be more inclined to take in the other person's arguments, to recognise without any shame when one has made a mistake, when coming to another understanding or opinion or when finally agreeing with the other's argument. It can also help one to be more humble when proved right or when one has influenced the other in changing their opinion. Of course, this is more or less easy depending on the other's position regarding their ego and their attitude in the discussion. Moreover, aiming to take a spiritual stance by considering the other as a sentient equal and as another part of the whole can be particularly hard for people who have suffered, or still suffer, from serious abuses or very traumatic occurrences. Facing one's oppressor or abuser can seem insurmountable and empathising undesirable and it is clear that spirituality alone will not resolve it all. The victim should certainly not have any obligation to forgive or even be around their abuser or oppressor and, again, any abuse or oppression must be strictly condemned. Nevertheless, with the help, support and collective energy of one's communities – family, friends, and other people who have experienced similar abuse or oppressions –, one can be reinforced and empowered to heal and transform. With the community, one can be helped on one's spiritual path to acceptance and empathy, and to the understanding that the reasons for the abuse or oppression are generally nothing more than blatant ignorance (yet sometimes combined with psychological imbalances like megalomania or personal traumas of the abuser/oppressor). I believe that by trying to understand the irrational constructed reasons that lead one to abuse or oppress and by intending to release the feelings of fear and anger towards their abuser or oppressor, a victim can gradually overcome their suffering (of course, spirituality is by no means the only way to get there). Naturally, the process of peace will be hard or impossible to fully reach without a sense of justice, i.e. not revenge but reparation and apology.

The duality or binary way of understanding life is also what Edward Said explained in *Orientalism* in which the generated structures of thinking in binary opposition established 'colonial authority' – as I mentioned in the part on defining spirituality [13]. The binary way of understanding life is what causes people to get so attached to social constructions such as the ones attributed to: man and women, white and non-white, civilised and savage, developed and un-developed or developing, rich and poor, Christian and heretic, etc. The list is non-exhaustive and the examples I have chosen are some that are used by the dominant systems of oppressions in the Western world (and not only). To be duly noted, the binary distinction between rich and poor for example can be used both by the dominant classes understood as respectively hard-working/worthy/educated and lazy/unworthy/ignorant and by the working class understood as respectively bourgeois/exploiter/idle-class and hard-working/exploited/*the*-people. Understanding the limits of binary categorising does not mean that there are no differences between different sociological categories nor that it cannot be useful to use them sometimes (concerning antiracism, feminism, and class struggle for example). However, it shows that reality is far more complex and, thus, that its understanding cannot merely be reduced to attributing values and impervious sets of behaviours to strictly defined categories on the base of arbitrary binary systems.

Going over binary categories enabled the acknowledgement of intersectionality as the "complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups" (Merriam Webster dictionary). Moreover, going over binaries along with determining individualities has enabled people to

understand their identities and sexual preferences outside the cis-hetero-normative constructs. The LGBTIQ+ group has had many other denominations such as LGBTTIQQ2SAAP+ in order to be inclusive to the enlarged understanding of many different sexual identities [14]. This has been beneficial to deconstruct the ruthless binary gender-sexual constructions and, for people who do not recognise themselves in the main constructs, to be aware that it is fine that they do not, that they are not alone and that they can understand their gender-sexuality differently with the help of some of the already identified categories. However, the limit of labelling different gender-sexual identities is probably that there must be as many gender-sexual identities as there are identities. Thus, if these indeed help one emancipate oneself from the constructed norms, it does not define their entire identity and believing that it does can be the cause of new divisive factors within society. May it be clear, my point is not to undermine the essential – and for many lifesaving – work accomplished by the LGBTIQ+ communities in asserting their rights to identify with categories outside the cis-hetero-norm. I believe that figuring oneself out as an individual in a confusing and oppressive society is essential. Nevertheless, I also think that it is a first step one ought not to stop at, and that adopting a spiritual view can help one understand oneself as part of a great whole that transcends and unites people beyond their individualities and social categories. Being one's specific self while adopting a spiritual stance can help one to overcome the binary divisions from the ego through consideration and empathy both for oneself and others; understanding that differences lie in specificities and that fundamentally people *are* the same.

- **"Eco-anxiety", spiritual connection to nature and radical systemic change**

Finally, the spiritual recognition of being part of a greater universal whole can make one feel more deeply connected to nature and encourage a contemplative and harmonious relationship with the Earth. With political and scientific understandings of the impacts of capitalist consumerist societies on people and ecosystems, enhancing one's sense of value and empathy for the living can encourage one to act in favour of radical systemic change. It can also make one understand the benefits of living a life of sobriety away from superfluous material objectives. Furthermore, understanding the seriousness of global change can be quite disheartening and a source of "eco-anxiety". Religions, faiths, and spiritual practices can help counter these feelings by giving one a sense of community, peace, hope and resilience [15].

4. Some lessons from Buddhism

Religions and spiritual movements may disagree on many beliefs and concepts, but each contains philosophical or theological orientations that convey messages of love and compassion. They all have messages that can be interpreted and applied in ways to call for human equality and protection of the Earth and of all life forms on it. Then why finish this pamphlet on the decline of Christianity's hegemony in the Western world and the importance of spirituality with a section on Buddhism?

In this final part on Buddhism, my objective is not in proselytism and nor will it be to dwell on the specificities and differences of Buddhist movements – which I am not very familiar with to be honest. I do not wish the readers to abandon their personal faith nor convert to Buddhism – I myself identify neither as a Buddhist nor as a Christian but rather as a spiritually inclined agnostic. Nor do I wish to present Buddhism has having more or better potentials than other religions; every religion must certainly have both remarkable and undesirable characteristics and I probably could have decided to make an opening with another religion. In fact, I agree with the following quote from the book '*Living Buddha, Living Christ*' [1a] written by the Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh:

"We [*Christians and Buddhists – to which could be added other religions too*] have different roots, traditions, and ways of seeing, but we share the common qualities of love, understanding, and acceptance. For our dialogue to be open, we need to open our hearts, set aside our prejudices, listen deeply, and represent truthfully what we know and understand. To do this, we need a certain amount of faith. In Buddhism, faith means confidence in our and others' ability to wake up to our deepest capacity of loving and understanding. In

Christianity, faith means trust in God, the One who represents love, understanding, dignity, and truth. When we are still, looking deeply, and touching the source of our true wisdom, we touch the living Buddha and the living Christ in ourselves and in each person we meet." [1b]

Thus, I am writing this final part on Buddhism to pursue opening a dialogue from the Westerner's perspective strongly affected by Christianity's millenary hegemony and to a presentation of – and opening to – teachings and practices of a great universal religion of the Eastern world, Buddhism. I see in this often-called *philosophical* religion some great potentials of teaching to get rid of some Western tendencies to self-centred individualistic views. Moreover, it also has some interesting particularities that differ greatly from Abrahamic religions. Although Buddhism is a 2500-year-old universal religion, it has mostly been neglected or misunderstood by the Western world (this includes Nietzsche's distorted understanding [2]). In fact, with the spiritual gap left by the decline of Christianity's hegemony, many Westerners' spiritual search has led them to be attracted to - or even convert to - Buddhism for its flexible use of religious language, its sense of organic relationship with nature, and its emphasis on a visceral and intuitive perception of truth through direct experience [3].

- **Interdependent co-arising, impermanence and emptiness**

As I previously mentioned, the Western world took an important historical turn with the emphasis put on individual traits, on the ego and on the binary conceptualisations that result from them. This enabled both individual emancipations from systemic oppressions, and an excessive accentuation of egocentric and selfish traits. Many cultures greatly differ from Western societies; they understand the human as an intrinsic and interdependent part of its community, society and ecosystem and, thus, they do not conceptually distinguish it from them. With no distinction made between a person and their surroundings, there seems to be more awareness of the need to keep a certain balance in the whole.

In Buddhism, this is explained with the concept *pratityasamutpada* – which can be understood as "dependant origination" or "interdependent co-arising". According to the Zen monk Tchich Nhat Hanh, "the universal definition of pratityasamutpada […] is that everything arises in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions; nothing exists as a singular, independent entity." [4] Interdependent co-arising is an understanding of the interwoven complexity of interdependence; it is not merely a few factors that cause a specific change but a stream of interconnected phenomena that forms reality. A common example Buddhists use to explain dependent origination is that of a flower. People tend to make conceptual distinctions between the flower and the seed, soil, water, light and air. It can easily be understood that the flower depends on these to grow. Buddhism adds that these are themselves dependent upon a number of other interrelated casual factors and that altogether they form a single indivisible process. It is a conceptual illusion coming from the ego and passed through the language that makes one see the flower as a separate entity. Understanding the world through the ego compels one to feel a sense of separation from "the rest" or "the other". However, because there is no actual distinction according to Buddhist understanding, feeling a sense of separation, superiority or rejection of "the other" is nonsensical in Buddhism for there can be no hierarchy nor separation in dependent origination and rejecting "the other" is merely rejecting the self. Of course, Buddhists – like any other human beings – are imperfect and complex, so although Buddhism teaches the concept of "dependant origination", its followers are not exempt from feelings of (cultural) separations, distrust, hatred and penchants for violence. This has been historically reported by the Assistant Professor of Religious Studies Michael Jerryson in his co-edited book *'Buddhist Warfare'* [5] and has been the case in Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka in the last decades [6]. Nevertheless, by emphasising the importance of a practical approach to spirituality (see last section) over – an intentionally small number of – conceptual distinctions, Buddhism intends to prevent these feelings of separation from materialising.

With the understanding of everything as a stream of interconnected phenomena, come some other important notions in Buddhism; impermanence (*anitya*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Buddhists believe that one cannot

eliminate the source of their suffering if they continue to be tricked into the illusion of permanency in the things they crave [7]. Everything has a beginning and an end. Understanding and accepting this can reduce one's suffering. As for the Buddhist concept of emptiness, it is beyond cognitive understanding and can sometimes be accessed and felt during meditation [8]. As the Buddhist monk Tongey Mingyur Rinpoche wrote in his book '*In love with the world*':

"Impermanence - like emptiness - is an inherent characteristic of phenomena. Recognizing impermanence corrects misperceptions of permanence; but recognizing emptiness directly is even more helpful for working with attachment. Recognizing the fluidity of all forms disempowers the false claims of the fixed mind. It In turn, this expands our sense of who we are and what we can do." [9]

By recognising everything as one stream of interconnected phenomena and thus oneself as part of a *sangha* (community), one can be freed from feeling lonely, hurt and hateful. By recognising the impermanent characteristic of this phenomena, one can be freed from eternal dissatisfaction and suffering of a life based on possessing things or people. And by recognising life as complete in itself (without any need for superior beliefs or additional information), one can be freed from feeling scared, anxious and insecure with a mind blocked in existential questions.

- **Detachment from concepts and dogmas**

Although there are deities and dogmas in the various branches of Buddhism, they are not essential to it. In fact, Buddhists often use jarring and seemingly paradoxical phrases to provoke someone out of their beliefs in order to make them think for themselves. There is one famous story about Buddha regarding the existence of God [10]. A first old man coming to his last years had devoted all his life to Lord Rama (a Hinduist deity). When he asked the enlightened one if God exists, Buddha told him that He *does not*. Then a second old man, who had lived as an atheist and a materialist, asked him the same. Buddha told him that God *does* exist. The moral of this story is that it is not the belief as such that matters but that one must realise the truth in oneself with diligent self-effort. The enlightened one told each of the old men what they had to know in order for them to become stronger on their spiritual quest.

In the same way Buddha confronted these men's beliefs, Zen Buddhists use a particularly provocative sentence in their teachings: "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." [11] This of course would seem particularly absurd to most uninitiated people as they first hear it. Not only does "killing" seem contradictory to Buddhists' call for non-violence (that goes to the point of respecting the life of the smallest insects), but why would they tell one to kill their spiritual guide? Of course, "to kill" here should not be understood in its literal sense but rather as a thought-provoking way to push one to go beyond tendencies to materialise enlightenment into a thing (person, guru, book, etc.). One should not want to meet the Buddha or to absolutely crave enlightenment as a concrete objective but rather seek to make their own journey into consciousness and find truth within them by observing their thoughts.

The more one deepens their path into Buddhism, the more one comes to be detached from beliefs. As Thich Nhat Hanh explained, "the teaching is merely a vehicle to describe the truth. [One should not] mistake it for the truth itself. A finger pointing at the moon is not the moon." (*Tchich Nhat Hanh (1991)* [12]). He explains that on one's spiritual path, one should be ready to abandon one's present view to get a better view. This follows the doctrine of the two truths; a differentiation is made between the "conventional" or "provisional" truth that one has reached and the "ultimate" truth. Because of their practice of non-attachment to view, Buddhists have an important tolerance to other understandings. They aim to help others have a "better" view with what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "loving speech" and "deep listening" [13].

However, one may wonder: if Buddhism is detached from beliefs then what makes it different to twentieth-century post-structuralism or, worse, to Nietzsche's passive and despairing nihilist depiction of it?

As I explained in the part on Nietzsche, the philosopher understood Buddhism as being a form of passive nihilism as despair. Buddhist's detachment from the cycle of aimless drifting in mundane existence seemed unnatural to him and he considered that Buddhists lack strength to succeed in giving themselves a goal, a reason and a faith. For him, "Buddhism already has -- and this distinguishes it profoundly from Christianity -- the self-deception of moral concepts behind it -- it stands, in my language, beyond good and evil." [14] He came to these conclusions by understanding how distinctions between the material world and a higher spiritual realm serve one's need for security and that "bad" faith in religious values is motivated by this need. However, on his quest to understand how to live life "truly", he did not perceive how his alternative values – the celebration of the heroic-ego or *übermensch* (overman [15]) overcoming its sense of lack – reflect the same anxiety. The Zen teacher David Loy argues that Nietzsche's will-to-power turns out to be pure nihilism instead of a way to vanquish it. He explains that nihilism is not so much the collapse of all meaning as it is one's dread of that collapse and what one does to avoid it. He adds: "For Buddhism, the sense-of-self is not some self-existing consciousness but a mental construction which experiences its own groundlessness as a lack. On this account, our most problematic dualism is not so much life fearing death as a fragile sense-of-self dreading its own nothingness." This deep sense of lack causes one to feel anxiety and to desire to objectify it into something that may fill this feeling of emptiness. But without understanding the underlying motivations of these objectifications, one cannot overcome suffering. Buddhism's path to accept and yield to that groundlessness is the realisation that one has always been grounded, not as a self-present being but as one manifestation of a web of relationships that encompasses everything (*pratityasamutpada*). As Loy wrote: "If it is nothingness I am afraid of (i.e. the repressed intuition that, rather than being autonomous and self-existent, the 'I' is a construct), the best way to resolve that fear is to face up to what has been denied: that is, to accept my no-thing-ness by becoming nothing." [16] Nietzsche mistook Buddhism for a religion that refutes life in embracing emptiness when Buddhism in fact embraces emptiness to overcome suffering and lead one to empathy and happiness.

Buddhism's detachment from beliefs makes it seem anachronistically similar to post-structuralism. Both seem to share a view that the truth cannot be grasped intellectually, that there is a problem with the rational self, and that what people perceive as reality can be profoundly deconstructed, eliminated or shown illusory. However, it must initially be noted that post-structuralism comes as a reaction and criticism to modernity's great enthusiasm for rationalism and scientism whereas Buddhism preceded modernity by more than 2000 years and seeks to help one reach a state of enlightenment. Moreover, and more importantly, post-structuralism considers that there are no fundamental truths even in the structures beneath the idea of self [17], whereas for Buddhism the view that the truth cannot be grasped intellectually does not mean that there is no underlying truth. With the understanding of a Buddha-nature in all of us and the prospect of enlightenment through the Eightfold path [18], Buddhists believe that there is something under the rational self, which they understand as a type of universal truth [19]. So if, for many post-structuralists, people's best option is to live a life one would desire rather than a "meaningful" one [20] [21], for Buddhists, people's best option is to practice awareness in order to overcome their sense-of-self and the suffering that comes with it and to embrace feelings of true love and compassion [22]. As Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche put it:

"The more we recognise awareness, the more access we have to our own loving qualities. Loving-kindness and compassion are the natural expressions of awareness because genuine expressions of an open heart transcend conceptual ideas and attitudes, and exist beyond duality, beyond words and logic. The same qualities apply to awareness, and the more we rest within the boundless state of awareness, the more our love and compassion become boundless." (*Mingyur Rinpoche (2019)* [23])

- **Practical spirituality – meditation**

Thus, beliefs and concepts exist in Buddhism but they are not the fundamentals of it and the teachings are merely a vehicle to help one in their practice. As Aldous Huxley wittily wrote in his utopian novel *Island*:

"Western philosophers, even the best of them –they're nothing more than good talkers. Eastern philosophers are often rather bad talkers, but that doesn't matter. Talk isn't the point. Their philosophy is pragmatic and operational." (*Huxley (1962)* [24])

So what is this "pragmatic and operational" philosophy found not only in Buddhism but also in many other Asian and even Middle Eastern traditions? Potentially dating back to 3000 BCE, **meditation** is the act of engaging "in mental exercise for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness" (Merriam Webster definition]. In Buddhism, meditation is a means of transforming the mind, which – through various techniques – encourages and develops "concentration, clarity, emotional positivity and a calm seeing of the true nature of things" [25]. Differently from one common understanding of wisdom in the Western world as an accumulation of knowledge, Buddhists find wisdom in knowing nothing. Of course, this does not mean being ignorant or not having any knowledge, but rather it is one's ability to free oneself from the knowledge that is cultivated through the ego; instead of adding anything, everything vanishes including feelings of anger, fear, anxiety, frustration, envy, greed, etc. [26]

Yongey Mingyur Rimpoche construes how one should undertake meditation in order to find peace and awareness. He explains that if one understands meditation as having an empty mind or brain freed from thoughts and emotions and thus intends to block them, one will get agitated and frustrated by the impossibility of the task. Likewise, if one is desperate to find peace, calmness and joy through meditation, these cravings and expectations will not come forth for the mind does the contrary to what one urges it to do; it becomes rigid and unworkable. However, if one meditates truly by accepting the moving and changing nature of the mind, and by embracing uncritically the thoughts, emotions and noises that come through it – whether blissful or painful –, the mind will become pliable and workable; one will be enabled to connect with their basic goodness and deeper quality of awareness. Mingyur Rimpoche describes the fundamental quality of our minds as being a sky of awareness, love and compassion, and wisdom. Thoughts and emotions are merely clouds passing in this sky. By letting them go through, one's feelings of stress, anxiety and suffering can gently float away [27]. The Zen master Shōhaku Okumura depicts *Zazen* (Zen meditation) as being good for nothing. This may seem a little peculiar from someone who meditates a lot, but what Okumara means by this is that the purpose of meditation should not be to fulfil an egoistic goal such as being "good" or "enlightened". Instead, one should meditate outside one's social occupations and egoistic preoccupations, and embrace a sense of detachment and meaningfulness, i.e. embracing the present moment as it is – everything is okay [28]. Once again it is not one's understanding of the theoretical teaching (the finger) that brings awareness and compassion (the moon) but one's direct experience of it though meditation [29].

With the spiritual practice of meditation, one can gradually be at peace, become detached from one's ego and embrace interdependent co-arising (*pratityasamutpada*) and full empathy. For those who are doubtful of the benefits of meditation in spite of the teachings and demonstrations of Buddhism and other religions and traditions for thousands of years, some scientific studies have aimed to analyse these benefits. One study conducted by the Harvard professors of psychology Paul Condon and David DeSteno, of Biomedical Imaging Gaëlle Desbordes and of Religion Willa B. Miller found that people who meditate demonstrate more compassion in comparison to those who do not [30]. In another scientific discipline, some neuroscientists aimed to understand Buddhism from a neurological perspective. In his book *No Self, no problem: How Neuropsychology is catching up to Buddhism* [31], Chris Niebauer, did a comparative study in which he researched the brain and the way in which it relates to one's sense of self. He explains that the left side of the brain is responsible for rationality, logic, compartmentalising and producing language (talking both internally

and externally), whereas the right side of the brain is responsible for feelings, intuitions, creativity, etc. Because the right side of the brain is capable of reading information but not of expressing it, any information that goes to the right side is interpreted by the left side of the brain, even though the latter has not fully understood the information. Thus, the voice produced in one's head, and which is the sense of self a person identifies with, is merely a left-side-of-the-brain interpretation of everything one feels, perceives or senses. And one's left-side-of-the-brain interpretation is itself being fed with all the conceptualisations that have originated from the interpretations of all the left-side-of-the-brains since time immemorial. This intellectual blabbering may make it clearer why Buddhists consider knowledge to be in "knowing nothing". Niebauer joins Buddhist teachings that one is not one's thoughts by concluding that the ego or self is an illusion that exists as a thought rather than as an entity. Because the teachings are necessarily the interpretations of the experiences, they can only go so far as to give a direction (c.f. the moon). Meditation enables one to let go of the left-side-of-the-brain's conceptualisations by focusing on the right side of the brain.

Thus, meditation can be very beneficial if undertaken accurately. However, taking a spiritual approach detached from one's ego and individuality can be challenging – especially when these have been engrained in oneself for so long –, and meditation can also be misunderstood and misused. The great attraction many Westerners have towards Buddhism and the former's ardent willingness to learn from interdependence, wisdom and compassion does not instantly rid them of their engrained ego. Although everyone in Buddhist practice confronts the possessiveness of the ego, the professor and monk Victor Sogen Hori argues that ethnic Buddhists do not face quite the same conflict; their culture does not encourage them to see themselves as independent autonomous individuals but rather to find their identity and uniqueness within, and dependent upon, their social relationships and community. The Westerners' sense of self conflicts with the Buddhist teaching of *anatta* (no-self) and, thus, leads many to conceive the Buddhist practice as "freeing the self from incessant social conditioning and releasing its own pure nature", i.e. affirming and realising the self. Hori gives the example of a weeklong Zen retreat he went to in China and which was attended by both white Americans and ethnic Chinese. At the end of the retreat, participants were asked to express what benefits they derived from it. The Americans uniformly spoke about how it had helped them to get in touch with themselves and to give them strength and sanity to cope with pressures of society and in their process of self-realisation. The Chinese, however, rather talked about how it had made them feel ashamed and repentant in the realisation of how selfish they usually were. One added how she wished to apologise to her family and perform some act of deep repentance [32]. Whilst it is not necessarily a bad thing in itself to affirm one's self – regarding its use for emancipation from social concepts and especially oppressions for example –, it is not the full purpose of meditation. The latter enables people to be further detached from their conceptual mind by loosening them from their sense of self and enabling them to embrace one-ness and feel full empathy. If someone "meditates" in order to be more focused on personal objectives of productivity or power/domination for example, they miss the full awareness potential of meditation because of their selfish and self-centred purposes. This is not true meditation. Likewise, if meditation is used to escape reality, it will cause the practitioner to develop a self-centred illusion that is not compassionate at all and can lead one to use their practice of meditation to feel "spiritually superior". This is discussed more thoroughly by the Buddhist master Chögyam Trungpa in his book *Cutting through spiritual materialism* [33].

That being said, I believe one must not remain discouraged and confused by the appearing complexity of the meditative release of the ego. By just sitting while being aware of the illusion of the ego and its deceptions, one can gently accept the thoughts and feelings coming through one's mind as nothing more than interpretations and slowly gain greater awareness and a greater sense of empathy. With the overflow of information and the crystallisation of disagreements into polarisations, the practical experience of meditation can help people come back to the essence of being beyond the sense of self and its interpretations and conceptualisations. With oneself understood as not being separated from the rest but part of it or even just *it*, one can feel a full sense of completeness, peace and empathy. Yet, this spiritual path should not be understood merely as the bettering of the individuality but as the bettering of oneself within the whole and so as the bettering of the whole; i.e.

one's meditative practice should lead one to acts of compassion – whether these be within their family and community or within the participation in systemic change for society as a whole. As Thich Nhat Hanh said as an encouragement to Engaged Buddhism:

"The practice should address suffering: the suffering within yourself and the suffering around you. They are linked to each other. […] If you don't know the roots of [your] afflictions, you cannot see the path leading to their cessation. That's why suffering is very important for our practice." [34]

Furthermore, social and egalitarian-minded people and activists may also benefit from the practice of meditation. Succeeding in changing and improving the system may be more difficult without looking into oneself; problems do not only arise and subsist from the outside and one is not completely outside the system. By meditating, one can understand the deeper motives for their urge to change the system. Does one act out of their own experienced suffering, and confuse it with – and project it onto – the oppressive realities of society? Or does one act out of their understanding of their own suffering and of the causes of others' suffering, and thus empathise with them and want to help them to reduce their suffering?

In his book *In love with the world*, Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche writes:

"People everywhere try so hard to make the world better. Their intentions are admirable, yet they seek to change everything but themselves. To make yourself a better person is to make the world a better place. Who develops industries that fill the air and water with toxic waste? How did we humans become immune to the plight of refugees, or hardened to the suffering of animals raised to be slaughtered? Until we transform ourselves, we are like mobs of angry people screaming for peace. In order to move the world, we must be able to stand still in it. Now more than ever, I place my faith in Gandhi's approach: Be the change you wish to see in the world. [...] ... there is no spiritual reality separate from daily life, and in that order to know anything of value about [one]self, and about living in the world, [one] would have to travel deep inside [one]self." (*Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche (2019)* [35])

V. Conclusion

When I started writing my final Master's thesis (turned into a pamphlet), my concerns were about how human understandings of the world had become so complex and too often (seemingly) incompatible to the point in which they would crystallise into social polarisations and normalised hatred. How could people's beliefs, traditions, concepts and categorisations reach a level in which they are deemed more important – or of superior value – to the lives and suffering of other people or sentient beings? The overflow of information and the grand scales of human societies and of the globalised world make it hard for people to connect and empathise with others that are presented to them as mere numbers or images on a screen. Indeed, the human brain is only adapted to maintain – and interact appropriately with – a social network of maximum 150 people. Consequently, cultural and institutional artefacts have been invented over and over throughout history to enable humans to interact on grander scales [1]. Yet, if traditions and institutions built throughout the years do sometimes succeed in consolidating and organising big groups of people, they generally tend to freeze in time and become sources of division in an evolving world – rather than of cohesion or cooperation. Because of how scary existence can seem with no fundamental certainties, people often tend to grip firmly onto what they know and understand – especially in rapidly changing times –causing strong reactionary positions and violent conflicts. Adding to that, forms of power and domination generally take control of institutions and strongly influence traditions, thus, becoming even greater sources of division. As time goes by, societies grow tensions between people who have been oppressed and disadvantaged by the status quo and those who have been privileged by it. Moreover, as the oppressions, disadvantages, life-experiences and understandings are many and complex, there is no complete uniformity in these tensions and fights.

Thus, the purpose of this pamphlet was to explore the influence that one notable historical development had on the current social situation in the Western world. The focus could have been put somewhere else and/or on other major historical events. Yet, the focus on the West came from an urge to deepen the reflections coming from my observations of hasty intolerances and fundamental misunderstandings, and the focus on Christianity came from a curiosity to understand what role this major – though often controversial – religion has had on my perspectives and sense of spirituality, on those of my family, on Western societies and on the rest of the world. Thus, I explored how the rise and decline of Christianity's hegemony impacted the Western world. Although it would be difficult to precisely quantify the many different ways and the unequal extent in which it has impacted people, it is safe to state that in its millenary-long hegemony it has had an important influence on people's attachment to traditions, in their relations to others and to spirituality, in their understandings of right and wrong and in their ideological and moral approaches to concepts of justice, equality and freedom. Emerging from Jewish traditions and Jesus' subversive message, Christianity gained immense power with the Roman Empire enabling it to impose itself over the Western world. We have seen how through the gradual replacement of local pagan cults in favour of new Christian cult-sites and through the organisation of people's private and public lives, it gradually gave/imposed Westerners a sense of belonging to a greater Christian faithful and moral group. Although this immersive religion did receive some resistance, it succeeded in establishing its hegemony – albeit often at the cost of its own spiritual message. Its hegemonic decline came gradually in a "ping-pong" match between historical events (power conflicts, social struggles, knowledge disruptions) and the Church's rigid and oppressive reactions. With a lesser attachment to power and to its dogmas and traditions, Christian institutions – and most notably the Catholic Church – could have evolved in conjunction with social changes. Doing so, they could have consolidated an emphasis on their spiritual message and the Western world might have been considerably different today. Nevertheless, following an anarchistic approach, a situation of inequality logically originated from the Christian's rise to power, causing considerable conflicts of interest and resulting in various forms of inefficiencies and irrationalities. Christianity's rise to power transformed Europe in a "unified" Christendom, yet considerably unequal and oppressive - which does not seem to have done that much good for the propagation of its spiritual message.

We have seen how, during the Age of Enlightenment, rationalism grew stronger as a superior source of knowledge to other senses of perception and as the sensible way to approach problems in life in opposition to the irrational and obscurantic behaviours attributed to the Church. Yet, rationalism was not built against the Church per se with many of its advocates aiming to rationally prove the existence of God or to accommodate reforms and traditional systems of power and faith. The Church's occasional attempts to discredit science and fight over constructs – instead of complementing it and endorsing the importance of spirituality – caused many to move away from faith and towards an increasingly secular assessment of the world with atheism and materialism. I have looked into how Nietzsche saw this historical process as the "death of God" and the forthcoming advent of nihilism in the Western world to understand how this decline was perceived and the consequences it has brought. Although Nietzsche's prophecy that people in the West would lose all value in life and any sense of meaning at all did not quite happen, it was an interesting perspective to consider in order to understand the extent to which the Christian faith had been *"protecting life against despair and the leap into nothing for centuries*". Yet, the philosopher was convinced that Christianity had been a form of masked or disoriented nihilism from its very start and was therefore condemned to self-destruct as the truth about its metaphysical foundations would be unravelled.

The elaborated reflections of Nietzsche being a consequence of the Christian hegemonic decline and a sequence to the Age of Enlightenment (itself having originated from this decline), I thought it was interesting to reflect on how the philosopher came to the conclusion that Christianity's "falseness" had inverted the natural order of ranks and power impeding the strong to fulfil their highest potentials and, thus, weakening society as a whole. Nietzsche embraced a "natural order of power" over egalitarian ideals and morals. It is intriguing that such a smart and complex mind as Nietzsche's came to the conclusion that love and compassion – and the morals deriving from them – could only have originated by the "falseness" of a metaphysical narrative and not by something more profound. I believe that this gave a first glimpse in my pamphlet to the limits of the rational mind. Moreover, even though his embracement of a "natural order of power" did not impede him to despise racism and nationalisms, a simplified understanding of the complexity – and sometimes of the confusion – of his writings has often and unfortunately been used by fascist movements to justify their stance against a "degenerated modern world" and their belief in a "pure white race". Although these movements build their identity on Christian roots, they do not believe in Christian values but in defending Christendom, which they consider to have bound European culture together [2]. Let alone the inconsistent miserable fantasy of the far right, I consider that it is important to realise that Nietzsche was wrong about domination being the natural course of life and equality and morals being a negation on the will to existence that should be got rid of. In fact, it is quite the contrary, the human desire for equality is neither a Christian invention nor can it be attributed to any other religion or ideology. It is truly a human constitutive trait; one of the fundamentals of human life in society [3]. Although concepts of goodness and morals are indeed social constructions that can – and sometimes should – be questioned, they are built on left-side-of-the-brain interpretations of the very natural feelings of empathy and on the instinctive need for mutual aid. The use of rationality can enable constructive critiques of concepts, but it cannot invalidate other sources of perception because it can only (mis)interpret them.

Unfortunately, with the Western excessive development of egocentric and individualist traits, and the noxious liberal economic idea that egoistic behaviours are beneficial for society as a whole, self-centred and selfish behaviours have been endorsed to thrive in Western societies and, progressively, in other parts of the world. As previously explained, the ego-centred view of the world is one of division and dualism. With globalism and overflows of information on the one hand, and with strong societal dichotomies appearing between the natural will to flourish and be happy and the reality of inequalities, violence and oppressions on the other, individual understandings of life tend to be situated on specific conceptually divided sides of the social dichotomies. Societies – in the West but also in other parts of the world – seem to be further polarised and hateful, and this possibly to a point in which there remains little common ground on which they can rely on to subsist. As I have analysed at the end of part III on Nietzsche, the excessive and multi social polarisations of societies could be assimilated as nihilist transformations of these societies foregoing their collapse. This polarised or nihilist

transformation of societies can be challenged by the idea of the pluriverse which gives place to different ways of being and living in different worlds of worlds and breaking with the universalising idea that all morals and conducts should be uniform in order to have social cohesion. However, the pluriverse can only be a reality if people succeed in finding a common ground of respect, tolerance and empathy.

This linked to the final part of my pamphlet. After understanding how the Western world lost its religiosity and spirituality in favour of individualism, materialism and rationalism, and with the observation of how these have fractured societies, I decided to advocate for what has now increasingly been neglected and misunderstood in the Western world: spirituality. In order to defend the importance of spirituality as a way to reconnect to each other and to our environments, I had to make sure that we agreed on a definition for me to proceed. Thus, I argued that spirituality – especially through its (non-conceptual) practice – can enable people to feel part of a greater universal whole encompassing everyone and everything. Endorsing spirituality can help reduce social polarisations by increasing people's sense of empathy. It can contribute favourably to social and ecological activism through acts of compassion; from the smallest altruistic behaviour to the association of empathy within political understanding of systemic problematics. Indeed, we have seen how, contrary to their depiction as mere social pacifiers, spirituality and religions have recurrently awakened radical movements breaking with the status quo and pleading for social and egalitarian changes. Outside (or beside) the spheres of spirituality and religion, political and philosophical reflections and socio-political theories have given us grids to understand the structures of politico-economical systems and tools to deepen existential questions. And modern period intellectuals deconstructed "reality", explaining how much more complex – yet paradoxically simpler somehow – it really is in regard to conceptual normative understandings. However, I argued that the rational and deconstructed understandings of reality which do not consider any underlying fundamental truth miss the possibility of coming to a greater awareness of sentient beings' joy and suffering, and, thus, of truly empathising with them.

I then made an outside-Western world opening by bringing the reader to a part on Buddhism. This ancient Eastern religion has the particularity to have adopted a de-conceptualised and practical approach. Although it might seem similar to Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism and to post-structuralism in its will to deconstruct reality, it greatly differs from them in its practical approach that leaves the realm of rationality to embrace the essence of what it is to be alive and feel. Nietzsche tried to understand Buddhism intellectually and, thus, was unable to grasp its detachment from concepts as nothing more than nihilism. However, through meditation, Buddhism helps one to let go of intellectual blabbering and suffering and simply be happy. With more recognition of awareness, Buddhists believe that people can have more access to their expressions of loving-kindness and compassion. The practice of meditation can also help one become gradually detached from the ego and feel more understanding, tolerance and empathy. People who do not feel especially attracted to social and egalitarian concepts may be more inclined towards them through loving and compassionate spiritual practice. It can help to go over binary categorising and divisive factors within societies. Meditators may feel more deeply connected to nature and encourage a contemplative and harmonious relationship to the Earth. With political and scientific understandings of the impacts of capitalist consumerist societies on people and ecosystems, enhancing one's sense of value and empathy for the living can encourage one to act in favour of radical systemic change. And people with social and egalitarian ideals might find a sense of inner peace from more understanding, consideration and empathy with meditation. This can help them to continue fighting for the freedom to exist, live and flourish equally and so also to prevent further social polarisations.

The goal of my pamphlet was not to defend a "universal linear spiritual quest" that everyone should follow for the world to be saved. It was certainly not to tell people what they should do – and I strongly hope it has not seemed that way. There are no absolute solutions and the arguments in my pamphlet are the result of my subjective reality with my personal reflections and shared discussions. Instead I give an overview of my reflection contextualised with some research to defend my deep conviction that there is still hope for people and other living beings beyond – and transcending – conceptual divisions. This hope is not, however, an

idealised view that we will succeed in "saving humanity" or our civilisation. Contrary to its many understandings as a universal linear quest to one improved society approaching "*the* truth" of human existences, human history has shown the emergence and collapse of many civilisations falling into the void of insignificance. In the year 2022 in which this pamphlet is written, the current human civilisation – and, with it, many species and ecosystems – are threatened by the disconnected human societies, their egocentric, selfish and divisive behaviours, their intolerance and hatred, and their addiction and lust for more. Nuclear threats are back, social oppressions and violence are strongly ongoing, and the human-caused degradation of the environment is accelerating promising more extreme weather conditions, more resource scarcities, more wars and more mass migrations. Thus, in these great times of uncertainties, it is of the uttermost importance that people come to political understanding and act. But with all the fear, anxiety and anger this implies, there is no better way to do this than by putting aside our conceptual differences altogether and by empathising, one sentient being with the other. We may not save our civilisation, but we can considerably reduce the suffering to come and take care of each other as much as we can.

VI. Bibliography

I. Introduction

[1] – Filka Sekulova, Isabelle Anguelovski, Lucia Argüelles, *et al.* (2017)
Article: "A 'fertile soil' for sustainability-related community initiatives: A new analytical framework"
From: the American independent publishing company "SAGE Journals"
Website link for the article: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0308518X17722167

[2] – Thomas Carothers, Andrew O'Donohue (2019)
Article: "How to Understand the Global Spread of Political Polarisation"
From: the nonpartisan international affairs think tank "Carnegie Endowment for International Peace"
Based on the book: "Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarisation" (2019) by Thomas Carothers, Andrew O'Donohue
Website link for the article: https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/01/how-to-understand-global-spread-of-political-polarization-pub-79893

[3] – Milan W. Svolik (2019)
Article: "Polarisation versus Democracy"
From: the quarterly academic journal "Journal of Democracy"
Website link for the article: https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/polarization-versus-democracy/

[4] – Murat Somer, Jennifer McCoy (2018)
Article: "Déjà vu? Polarisation and Endangered Democracies in the 21st Century"
From: the American independent publishing company "SAGE Journals"
Website link for the article: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0002764218760371

Sources on the spread of social and political polarisations referred to again in:
Part III.3 – [22]

[5] – Edward R Canda, Leola Dyrud Furman (1999)
Book: "Spiritual diversity in social work practice – the heart of helping", New York, The Free Press
At: p.37 & 57
Quoted from: Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, Jana Vinsky (2009)
Article: "Speaking from the Margins: A Critical Reflection on the 'Spiritual-but-not-Religious' Discourse in Social Work"
From: the peer-reviewed academic journal "British Journal of Social Work" on the sharing publication Website "ResearchGate"
Website link for the article:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249285527_Speaking_from_the_Margins_A_Critical_Reflection_on_the_'Spiritual-but-not-Religious'_Discourse_in_Social_Work
Cited in: part I – [5]; part IV.1 – [1]

[6] – **Website:** Hierarchy structure (2022)
Webpage: Religion hierarchy
Webpage link: https://www.hierarchystructure.com/category/religion-hierarchy/

[7] – Michael Winkelman, John R. Baker (2016)
Book: "Supernatural as Natural: A Biocultural Approach to Religion", London, Taylor and Francis, Routledge
In: "Chapter 1: Anthropology and the Study of Religion" – p.21 (for website link)
Website link for the chapter:
https://catalogue.pearsoned.ca/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0131893033.pdf
Cited in: part I – [7], [12], [13]; part II.1 – [2], [5]

[8] – Martin Paldam (2001)
Article: "Corruption and religion – Adding to the economic model"
Department of Economics, University of Aarhus, Denmark
Website link for the article: http://www.martin.paldam.dk/Papers/Corruption/Corruption-Religion/Correl-text.PDF

[9] – Omer Gokcekus, Tufan Ekici (2020)
Article: "Religion, Religiosity and Corruption"
From: the academic publisher "Springer Link"
Website link for the article: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13644-020-00421-2

[10] – Kevin Engel (2020)
Article: "Corruption and power: the connection"
From: the science bibliography website "Strategian Science"
Website link for the article: https://www.strategian.com/2020/10/22/corruption-and-power-the-connection/

[11] – Harriet Sherwood (2020)
Article: "Religious intolerance is 'bigger cause of prejudice than race', says report"
From: the British daily newspaper "The Guardian"
Website link for the article: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/15/religious-intolerance-is-bigger-cause-of-prejudice-than-race-says-report

[12] – Michael Winkelman, John R. Baker (2016)
See source: part I – [7], p.8 & 9

[13] – Michael Winkelman, John R. Baker (2016)
See source: part I – [7], p.21

II. Background – rise, establishment and decline of Christianity's hegemony

II.1 Hegemony of Christianity in the western Middle-Ages

- **Rise of Christianity's hegemony and configuration of the Western Middle Ages**

[1] – Marianne O'Doherty (2017)
Article: "Where Were the Middle Ages?"
From: the scholar-run online magazine "The Public Medievalist"
Category: "Race, Racism, and the Middle Ages"
Website link for the article: **https://www.publicmedievalist.com/where-middle-ages/**

[2] – Michael Winkelman, John R. Baker (2016)
See source: part I – [7]

[3] – The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica
Article: "The law of Justinian"
From: the Encyclopaedia "Britannica"
Website link for the article: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-law/The-law-of-property-and-possession

[4] – Simon Newman (2012)
Article: "Education in the Middle Ages"
From: the online information resource dedicated to world history "The Finer Times"
Website link for the article: https://www.thefinertimes.com/education-in-the-middle-ages
Cited in: part II.1 – [4], [8]

[5] – Michael Winkelman, John R. Baker (2016)
See source: part I – [7]

[6] – F. Donald Logan (2013)
Book: "A history of the Church in the Middle Ages", London, Routledge
In: Chapters 2 & 3
On: the open access library "academia.edu"
Website link for the book:
https://www.academia.edu/17790410/F_Donald_Logan_A_History_of_the_Church_in_the_Middle_Ages_London_Routledge_2013
Cited in: part II.1 – [6], [9], [10], [13], [14], [16]; part IV.2 – [1]

[7] – Silvia Federici (2004)
Book: "Caliban and the Witch – Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation", New York, Autonomedia
At: p.23-25 (ISBN 1-57027-059-7)
Website link for the book: https://libcom.org/article/caliban-and-witch-silvia-federici
Cited in: part II.1 – [7], [12], [15], part II.2 – [4], [5], [6]

- **Establishment of Christianity's hegemony**

[8] – Simon Newman (2012)
See source: part II.1 [4]

[9] – F. Donald Logan (2013)
See source: part II.1 [6]
In: Chapter 5

[10] – F. Donald Logan (2013)
See source: part II.1 [6]
In: Introduction

[11] – Chris Wickham (2009)
Book: "The Inheritance of Rome – A History of Europe from 400 to 1000", Allen Lane, Penguin Books
In: Part I.2 - p.62-65 (ISBN: 978-0-14-190853-3)
On: the open access library "academia.edu"
Website link for the book:
https://www.academia.edu/10351461/A_Far_Reaching_Inheritance_Review_of_Chris_Wickham_The_Inheritance_of_Rome_A_History_of_Europe_from_400_to_1000

[12] – Silvia Federici (2004)
See source: part II.1 [7]
At: p.26 (ISBN 1-57027-059-7)

[13] – F. Donald Logan (2013)
See source: part II.1 [6]
In: Chapter 14

[14] – F. Donald Logan (2013)
See source: part II.1 [6]
In: Introduction

[15] – Silvia Federici (2004)
See source: part II.1 [7]
At: p.26-27 (ISBN 1-57027-059-7)

[16] – F. Donald Logan (2013)
See source: part II.1 [6]
In: Chapter 3

[17] – Robet Chazan (2017)
Article: "The Arc of Jewish Life"
From: the scholar-run online magazine "The Public Medievalist"
Category: "Race, Racism, and the Middle Ages"

Website link for the article: https://www.publicmedievalist.com/arc-of-jewish-life/

II.2 Decline of Christianity's hegemony

II.2.1 From the mid-Middle Ages to the end of the Renaissance

- **Power conflicts**

[1] – Mary Fairchild (2019)
Article: "The Great Schism of 1054 and the Split of Christianity"
From: the Website "Learn Religions" from the American digital media company "Dotdash Meredith"
Website link for the article: https://www.learnreligions.com/the-great-schism-of-1054-4691893

[2] – The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica
Article: "Western Schism – Roman Catholic history"
From: the Encyclopaedia "Britannica"
Website link for the article: https://www.britannica.com/event/Western-Schism

[3] – Roger Scruton (1996)
Book: "A dictionary of political thought", London, Macmillan
At: p.470
Website link for the book:
https://archive.org/details/dictionaryofpoli0000scru_h0g0/page/n9/mode/2up

- **Struggles for freedom and equality**

[4] – Silvia Federici (2004)
See source: part II.1 [7]
At: p.34-35 (ISBN 1-57027-059-7)

[5] – Silvia Federici (2004)
See source: part II.1 [7]
At: p.45 (ISBN 1-57027-059-7)

[6] – Silvia Federici (2004)
See source: part II.1 [7]
At: p.33-34 (ISBN 1-57027-059-7)

- **Struggles & Power**

[7] – George M. Trevelyan (1899)
Book: "England in the Age of Wycliffe", New York, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co.
In: Chapters 4 to 6
Website link for the article: https://archive.org/details/englandinageofwy01trev

[8] – The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica
Article: "Jan Hus – Bohemian religious reader"
From: the Encyclopaedia "Britannica"
Website link for the article: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jan-Hus

[9] – Bamber Gascoigne (2001 ongoing)
Article: "History of Germany – Germany and the Reformation: 1517 – 1648"
From: the website on world history "HistoryWorld"
Website link for the article:
http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?groupid=2794&HistoryID=ac62&gtrack=pthc

[10] – David J. B. Trim (2010)
Article: "The Reformation and Wars of Religion"
From: the magazine on religious freedom "Liberty"
Website link for the article: https://www.libertymagazine.org/article/the-reformation-and-wars-of-religion

More on Wycliffe, Hus and Luther: https://www.quora.com/Why-did-Martin-Luther-succeed-where-John-Wycliffe-and-Jan-Hus-failed

- **Knowledge disruptions**

[11] – Elliot Fernandez (2022)
Article: "Renaissance and Humanism in Europe"
From: the private website "Elliot Fernandez – Front-End Developer"
Website link for the article: https://elliotfern.com/renaissance-and-humanism-in-europe/
Cited in: part II.2 – [11], [13]

[12] – Cousin Mac (2017)
Article: "Renaissance Political Thought – Civic Humanism and Renaissance Politics"
Website link for the article:
https://italiansintogasayingitsallgreektome.wordpress.com/2017/10/23/civic-humanism-and-renaissance-politics/

[13] – Elliot Fernandez (2022)
See source: part II.2 [11]

[14] – Ithiel de Sola (1983)
Book: "Technologies of freedom", Cambridge, Belknap Press
At: p.14 (on website)
Website link for the article: https://archive.org/details/technologiesoffr00ithi/page/14/mode/2up

[15] – Jose Figueroa (2018)
Article: "Heliocentrism: Galileo's Battle With the Church"

From: the academic website "Saint Mary's University Research Scholars Project"
Category: "Biographical Stories, Catholic Heritage, Cultural History, History"
Website link for the article: https://stmuscholars.org/heliocentrism-galileos-battle-with-the-church/

[16] – Justin Skirry
Article: "René Descartes (1596-1650)"
From: the Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy"
Website link for the article: https://iep.utm.edu/rene-descartes/#SH5b

[17] – Martin Duboisée de Ricquebourg (2020)
Article: "Isaac Newton – friend or foe to biblical creation?"
From: the biblically consistent paper publisher "Journal of creation"
Website link for the article: https://dl0.creation.com/articles/p137/c13759/j34-3_122-128.pdf

II.2.2 From the Age of Enlightenment into the modern era

- **The Age of Enlightenment**

[18] – Jonathan I. Israel (2006)
Book: "Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man (1670-1752)", Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011
In: "Part I Introductory"
Website link for the book:
https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199279227.001.0001/acprof-9780199279227

[19] – Willi Goetschel (2004)
Book: "Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine." Madison (USA), London, The University of Wisconsin Press
In: "Part 2 Spinoza through Mendelssohn"

[20] – William Bristow (2017)
Article: "Enlightenment"
From: the "Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy"
Website link for the article: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/enlightenment/#RelEnl
Specific quote: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism#cite_note-Stanford_2017-6

[21] – Zofia J. Zdybicka (2005)
Article: "Atheism"
From: the "Universal Encyclopaedia of Philosophy"
Website link for the page: http://ptta.pl/pef/index.php?id=glowna&lang=en
Link to the article: http://ptta.pl/pef/haslaen/a/atheism.pdf
Wikipedia source to the article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism#CITEREFZdybicka2005

[22] – Geoffrey Blainey (2011)

Book: "A Short History of Christianity", Viking
At: p.390-391 (ISBN 9780670075249)

[23] – [24] – The Editors of Encyclopedia.com
Article: "The Scientific Revolution"
From: the online encyclopaedia "Encyclopedia.com"
Category: "Christianity, Science, and the Enlightenment"
Website link for the article: https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/culture-magazines/christianity-science-and-enlightenment

[25] – G. Connor Salter (2021)
Article: "How did the Enlightenment impact the Church?"
From: the Website "Christianity.com"
Website link for the article: https://www.christianity.com/wiki/history/how-did-the-enlightenment-impact-the-church.html

[26] – The Editors of History.com (2020)
Article: "Enlightenment"
From: the Website "History.com"
Website link for the article: https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/enlightenment#section_3

More Enlightenment information:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment#Religion
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism#Early_Middle_Ages_to_the_Renaissance

- **Nineteenth century: Romanticism, Atheism… Turmoil and accelerated change**

[27] – Theo Hobson (2014)
Article: "Atheism is an offshoot of deism"
From: The British news and media website "The Guardian"
Website link for the article: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/03/jean-jacques-rousseau-atheism-deism

[28] – Shu-Chin Chang (2003)
Article: "The Catholic Response to Enlightenment and Modernity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries"
From: the Department of History of the "Fu-Jen Catholic University", Taiwan
Website link for the article: https://www.ea.sinica.edu.tw/eu_file/12014248444.pdf

[29] – The "College Board" (2009)
Article: "Chapter 17. The Rise of New Ideologies in the Nineteenth Century"
From: the free online library on history books "Erenow"
Category: "Exam preparation materials / AP European History ("
Website link for the article: https://erenow.net/common/apeurohist/18.php

[30] – Timothy B. Smith
Article: "The Nineteenth Century"
From: the online encyclopaedia "Encyclopedia.com"
Website link for the article: https://www.encyclopedia.com/international/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/nineteenth-century

III. Nietzsche – The decline of Christianity and the advent of nihilism

[1] – "Eternalised" (2021)
Article: "Nihilism – Friedrich Nietzsche's Warning to The World"
From: the philosophy and psychology website "Eternalised – in Pursuit of Meaning"
Website link for the article: https://eternalisedofficial.com/2021/10/15/nihilism-friedrich-nietzsche/
Cited in: part III –[1]; part III.1 – [2], [5]; part III.2 [1], [2]

III.1 Defining Nietzsche's view on nihilism

[2] – "Eternalised" (2021)
See source: part III – [1]

[3] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
Book: "The Will to Power", Vintage books, New York, A division of Random House
Translated by: Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale
Edited and commented by: Walter Kaufmann
In: Book 1 – Section 2&3
Website link for the book:
https://archive.org/details/FriedrichNietzscheTheWillToPower/page/n1/mode/2up
Cited in: part III.1 – [3], [4], [6]; part III.2 – [1], [2]; part III.3 – [3], [4], [5], [6]

[4] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Sections 15&13

[5] – "Eternalised" (2021)
See source: part III – [1]

[6] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Sections 22&23

III.2 Christianity; the holder of values and morals

[1] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Section 4

[2] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Section 55

[3] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1887)
Book: "On the Genealogy of Morals – Ecce Homo", Vintage books, New York, A division of Random House
Translated by: Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale
Edited and commented by: Walter Kaufmann
In: Book 2 – Section 7
Website link for the book: https://archive.org/details/nietzscheonthegenealogy
Cited in: part III.2 – [3], [4]

[4] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1887)
See source: part III.2 – [3] : Book 3 – Section 28

[5] – João Constâncio (2017)
Article: "Nietzsche and Schopenhauer: On Nihilism and the Ascetic "Will to Nothingness""
From: the academic publisher "Springer Link" and the "Universidade Nova de Lisboa", Portugal
Website link for the article: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-62947-6_20

[6] – "SparkNotes Editors" (2005)
Article: "Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)"
From: the educational Website "SparkNotes"
Category: Philosophy
Website link for the article: https://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/nietzsche/themes/
Cited in: part III.2 – [6]; part III.3 – [2]; part IV.4 [15]

[7] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1881)
Book: "Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality", Leiter, Cambridge University Press
Translated by: R. J. Hollingdale
Edited and commented by: M. Clark and B. Leiter
In: Section 163
Quote from: Brian Leiter (2021)
Article: "Nietzsche's Moral and Political Philosophy"
From: the "Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy"
Website link for the article: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche-moral-political/

[8] – Thomas J. Joudrey (2017)
Article: "The Defects of Perfectionism: Nietzsche, Eliot, and the Irrevocability of Wrong in *Middlemarch*"
From: the "Philological Quaterly 96.1" on the public library "TheFreeLibrary.com"
Website link for the article:
https://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+defects+of+perfectionism%3a+Nietzsche%2c+Eliot%2c+and+the...-a0497447130

III.3 Is the advent of nihilism inevitable or have ideologies succeeded in counterbalancing the decline of Christianity's hegemony?

- **The advent of nihilism**

[1] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Sections 10, 31 & 37

[2] – "SparkNotes Editors" (2005)
See source: part III.2 – [6]

[3] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Section 110

[4] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Section 20

[5] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Section 30

[6] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1967)
See source: part III.1 – [3] : Book 1 – Section 51

[7] – Philip Mirowski (2009)
Book: "The neo-liberal thought collective", Harvard, USA: Harvard University Press.
On: the public library "TheFreeLibrary.com"
Website link for the article: https://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+neo-liberal+thought+collective.-a0237057729

[8] – George Monbiot (2016)
Article: "The Rise of Neoliberalism: The Cause of Extreme Inequality?"
From: The British news and media website "The Guardian"
Website link for the article: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot
Cited in: part III.3 [8], [11]

[9] – Greg Caramenico (2022)
Article: "What is State Capitalism"
From: the Website "SmartCapitalMind"
Website link for the article: https://www.smartcapitalmind.com/what-is-state-capitalism.htm

[10] – Scott Kennedy and Jude Blanchette (2021)
Article: "Chinese State Capitalism – Diagnosis and Prognosis"
From: the bipartisan, non-profit policy research organisation "Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)"
Website link for the article: https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinese-state-capitalism

- **21rst century – age of great polarisations and… nihilism?**

[11] – George Monbiot (2016)
See source: part III.3 [8]

[12] – Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster (2011)
Book: "What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism: A Citizen's Guide to Capitalism and the Environment"
Website link to a description of the book:
https://books.google.fr/books/about/What_Every_Environmentalist_Needs_to_Kno.html?id=SjgUCgAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y

[13] – Kim Janssens (2011)
Article: Thesis on "Living in a material world: The effects of advertising on materialism"
From: the academic research Website "Ku Leuven"
Website link for the article: https://limo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS1858919&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&fromSitemap=1

[14] – Contributor to the "University of Bologna Business School" (2018)
Article: "The marketing of holidays. How consumption has transformed traditions"
From: the "University of Bologna Business School"
Website link for the article: https://www.bbs.unibo.eu/the-marketing-of-holidays-how-consumption-has-transformed-traditions/

[15] – Charlotte Gage (2021)
Article: "Advertising and consumerism violate human rights and the environment – but international law gives us the tools to fight back."
From: the activist Website "AdFree Cities – for happier, healthier cities"
Website link for the article: https://adfreecities.org.uk/2021/06/advertising-and-consumerism-violate-human-rights-and-the-environment-but-international-law-gives-us-the-tools-to-fight-back/

[16] – John Kenneth Galbraith (1998) – *(first published in 1958*)
Book: "The Affluent Society", Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York
Website link to a description of the book:
https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/934012.The_Affluent_Society

[17] – Chris Large (2018)
Article: "Rethinking consumerism for the sake of young people's mental health –and the planet"
From: the "Environmental Funders Network" – a network of trusts, foundations and individuals making grants on environmental and conservation issues
Website link for the article: https://www.greenfunders.org/2018/05/24/rethinking-consumerism-for-the-sake-of-young-peoples-mental-health-and-the-planet/comment-page-1/?unapproved=2117&moderation-hash=a79eb5303662c411cc83d90e48b7a3a2#comment-2117

[18] – Gwendolyn Blue (2018)
Article: "Scientism: A problem at the heart of formal public engagement with climate change"
From: the International Journal for Critical Geographies "ACME"
PDF link for the article: https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/download/1554/1435/

[19] – Paul Feyerabend (1993) – *(first published in 1978*)
Article: "Against Method", Verso, London, Newy York
Website link for the book: https://books.google.es/books?id=8y-FVtrKeSYC&lpg=PP9&pg=PA11&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

[20] – Archives from 2000 to 2022
Article: "Scientism"
From: the Glossary Index on "web.archives.org"
https://web.archive.org/web/20170707201525/http:/www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gengloss/sciism-body.html

[21] – Rupert Sheldrake (2013)
Video: "The Science Delusion BANNED TED TALK"
From: the American online video sharing and social media platform "YouTube" and originating (although banned) from the American-Canadian media organisation "TEDx"
Website link for the article: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKHUaNAxsTg

[22] – Referring to sources in Part I – Introduction:
[2] – Thomas Carothers, Andrew O'Donohue (2019)
[3] – Milan W. Svolik (2019)
[4] – Murat Somer, Jennifer McCoy (2018)

[23] – Kerstin Skork, Elena Hungerland (2021)
Article: "Polarisation and mobilisation on social media affect infection figures"
From: the German institution in the field of basic research "Max-Planck-Gessellschaft"
Website link for the article: https://www.mpg.de/16818769/0503-bild-polarization-and-mobilization-on-social-media-affect-infection-figures-149835-x

[24] – Monika Sie Dhian Hp, Christopher Houtkamp and Bod Deen (2022)
Article: "Polarisation of attitudes towards Russia in the Netherlands"
From: the independent think-tank "Clingendael – the Netherlands Institute of International Relations"
Website link for the article: https://www.clingendael.org/publication/polarisation-attitudes-towards-russia-netherlands

[25] – Marco Carnelos (2022)
Article: "Russia-Ukraine war: In the West's response, emotion has overcome reason"
From: the London-based online news outlet "Middle East Eye"

Website link for the article: https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/russia-ukraine-war-emotion-overcome-west-response

[26] – Lee Rainie, Scott Keeter and Andrew Perrin (2019)
Article: "Trust and Distrust in America"
From: the nonpartisan fact tank "Pew Research Center"
Website link for the article: https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/trust-and-distrust-in-america/

[27] – Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022)
Report: "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability – IPCC WGIII Sixth Assessment Report"
From: the "Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change"
Website link for the article: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/

[28] – Ashish Kothari *et al.* (2019)
Book: "Pluriverse - A Post development dictionary", Tulika Books, New Delhi, India
Website link for the book: https://radicalecologicaldemocracy.org/pluriverse/

IV. Further discussions – The importance of spirituality

IV.1 Defining spirituality and why it is important

[1] – Edward R Canda, Leola Dyrud Furman (1999)
Quoted from: Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, Jana Vinsky (2009)
See source: part III.3 – [5] : p.37 & 57

[2] – Austin Cline (2019)
Article: "Karl Marx on Religion as the Opium of the People"
From: the faith and religion educative Website "Learn Religions"
Website link for the article: https://www.learnreligions.com/karl-marx-on-religion-251019

[3] – Avaneesh Pandey (2015)
Report: "Pew Survey Predicts Rise In Atheism In US, Europe Despite Growing Religiosity Worldwide"
From: the digital global news publication "International Business Times – IBTimes"
Website link for the article: https://www.ibtimes.com/pew-survey-predicts-rise-atheism-us-europe-despite-growing-religiosity-worldwide-1869696

[4] – GALLUP contributors (2021)
Study on Religion in America
From: the global analytics and advice firm "GALLUP"
Website link for the article: https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx

[5] – Christopher Wanamaker (2020)
Article: "The Hrowth of Materialism in Our World"
From: the political and social Website "Soapboxie"
Website link for the article: https://soapboxie.com/social-issues/The-Growth-of-Materialism-in-Our-World

[6] – George Monbiot (2013)
Article: "Materialism: a system that eats us from the inside out"
From: The British news and media website "The Guardian"
Website link for the article:
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/09/materialism-system-eats-us-from-inside-out

[7] – Tim Kasser, Katherine L. Rosenblum, Arnold J. Sameroff, *et al.* (2013)
Article: "Changes in materialism, changes in psychological well-being: Evidence from three longitudinal studies and an intervention experiment"
From: the academic publisher "Springer Link"
Website link for the article: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11031-013-9371-4

[8] – James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton (1992)
Book: "Perspectives on the new age", Albany, New York, State University of New York Pres
In: Introduction
Website link for a preview of the book:
https://archive.org/details/perspectivesonne0000unse_m6u6/page/n1/mode/2up

[9] – Neil Henery (2003)
Book: "The reality of visions: Contemporary theories of spirituality in social work"
In the book: "British Journal Of Social Work", Oxford University Press
At: p.1105 to 1113
Quoted from: Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, Jana Vinsky (2009)
Article: "Speaking from the Margins: A Critical Reflection on the 'Spiritual-but-not-Religious' Discourse in Social Work"
From: the peer-reviewed academic journal "British Journal of Social Work" on the sharing publication Website "ResearchGate"
Website link for the article:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249285527_Speaking_from_the_Margins_A_Critical_Reflection_on_the_'Spiritual-but-not-Religious'_Discourse_in_Social_Work

[10] – Jeremy Carrette and Richard King (2005)
Book: "Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion", London, Routledge
At: p.30
Quoted from: Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, Jana Vinsky (2009)
Article: "Speaking from the Margins: A Critical Reflection on the 'Spiritual-but-not-Religious' Discourse in Social Work"

From: the peer-reviewed academic journal "British Journal of Social Work" on the sharing publication Website "ResearchGate"
Website link for the article:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249285527_Speaking_from_the_Margins_A_Critical_Reflection_on_the_'Spiritual-but-not-Religious'_Discourse_in_Social_Work

[11] – Edward W. Said (1979)
Book: "Orientalism", New York, Vintage Books
Quoted from: Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, Jana Vinsky (2009)
Article: "Speaking from the Margins: A Critical Reflection on the 'Spiritual-but-not-Religious' Discourse in Social Work"
From: the peer-reviewed academic journal "British Journal of Social Work" on the sharing publication Website "ResearchGate"
Website link for the article:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249285527_Speaking_from_the_Margins_A_Critical_Reflection_on_the_'Spiritual-but-not-Religious'_Discourse_in_Social_Work
Cited in: part IV.1 – [11] and part IV.3 – [13]

[12] – Heather D'Cruz, Philip Gillingham and Sebastian Meiendez (2007)
Journal article: "Reflexivity, its meanings and relevance for social work: A critical review of the literature",
In the book: "British Journal Of Social Work", Oxford University Press
At: p.73 to 90
Quoted from: Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, Jana Vinsky (2009)
Article: "Speaking from the Margins: A Critical Reflection on the 'Spiritual-but-not-Religious' Discourse in Social Work"
From: the peer-reviewed academic journal "British Journal of Social Work" on the sharing publication Website "ResearchGate"
Website link for the article:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249285527_Speaking_from_the_Margins_A_Critical_Reflection_on_the_'Spiritual-but-not-Religious'_Discourse_in_Social_Work

[13] – Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, Jana Vinsky (2009)
Article: "Speaking from the Margins: A Critical Reflection on the 'Spiritual-but-not-Religious' Discourse in Social Work"
From: the peer-reviewed academic journal "British Journal of Social Work" on the sharing publication Website "ResearchGate"
Website link for the article:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249285527_Speaking_from_the_Margins_A_Critical_Reflection_on_the_'Spiritual-but-not-Religious'_Discourse_in_Social_Work

IV.2 Christianity, power and spirituality

- **An anarchist critique of authority and power**

[1] – F. Donald Logan (2013)
Cited in: Part II.1 – [6]
In: Introduction

[2] – Kevin Carson (2020)
Paper: "An Anarchist Critique of Power Relations within Institutions"
On: the open access library "academia.edu"
Website link for the article:
https://www.academia.edu/65574743/An_Anarchist_Critique_of_Power_Relations_within_Institutions

[3a], [3b], [3c] – Jacques Ellul (1991) – *first published in 1988*
Book: "Anarchy & Christianity", Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans
Translated by: Geoffrey W. Bromiley
In: Introduction
On: "The Anarchist Library"
Website link for the book: https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jacques-ellul-anarchy-christianity-en

[4] – Julius Evola (1995) – *first published in 1934*
Book: "Revolt Against the Modern World"
Translated by: Guido Stucco
At: p.288 (page in the book digitalised on the website)
Website link for the book:
https://archive.org/details/juliusevolarevoltagainstthemodernworld_20190715/page/n161/mode/2up?view=theater&q=catholicism

[5] – Helen Young (2017)
Article: "Where Do the "White Middle Ages" Come From?"
From: the scholar-run online magazine "The Public Medievalist"
Category: "Race, Racism, and the Middle Ages"
Website link for the article: https://www.publicmedievalist.com/white-middle-ages-come/

[6] – Sihong Lin (2017)
Article: "The Mystery of Stephen the African"
From: the scholar-run online magazine "The Public Medievalist"
Category: "Race, Racism, and the Middle Ages"
Website link for the article: https://www.publicmedievalist.com/mystery-stephen-african/

[7] – Paul B. Sturtevant (2017)
Article: "Race, Racism and the Middle Ages: Looking Back, Looking Forward"

From: the scholar-run online magazine "The Public Medievalist"
Category: "Race, Racism, and the Middle Ages"
Website link for the article: https://www.publicmedievalist.com/looking-back-forward/

- **Back to spirituality, love and compassion?**

[8] – Conrad Hackett and David McClendon (2017)
Article: "Christians remain world's largest religious group, but they are declining in Europe"
From: the nonpartisan fact tank "Pew Research Center"
Website link for the article: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/

[9] – "Hercynian Forest" (2021)
Article: "What Was the Valladolid Debate"
From: the open platform "Medium"
Website link for the article: https://hercynianforest.medium.com/what-was-the-valladolid-debate-3e04867ffb8f

[10a] [10b] – "Lumen Learning" Contributors
Article: "Religion and Social Change"
From: the educational online materials and resources Website "Lumen Learning"
Category: Introduction to Sociology
Website link for the article: https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-introductiontosociology/chapter/religion-and-social-change/

[11] – Dennis Coday (2013)
Article: "Pope's Quotes: An economy that kills"
From: the independent Catholic news source "National Catholic Reporter"
Website link for the article: https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/popes-quotes-economy-kills

[12] – Monica Petrucci (2018)
Article: "Pope Francis is the Progressive Shepherd"
From: the online magazine written and illustrated by American college students "Study Breaks"
Website link for the article: https://studybreaks.com/news-politics/pope-francis-progressive/

[13] – Bill Hoffmann (2013)
Article: "Francis: 'I Did Not Want to be Pope'"
From: the independent, conservative American news and opinion website "NewsMax"
Website link for the article: https://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/pope-francis-didnt-want/2013/06/07/id/508707/

[14] – John K. Yost (2009)
Article: "The Reformation Defense of Clerical Marriage in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI"
From: the "Cambridge University Press"

Website link for the article: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/church-history/article/abs/reformation-defense-of-clerical-marriage-in-the-reigns-of-henry-viii-and-edward-vi/AB9CD406B2F5D519055712645E8B9AC8

[15] – "en-academic.com" Contributors (2022)
Article: "Ordination of women in Protestant churches"
From: the website "en-academic.com"
Website link for the article: https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/11861253

[16] – "Fellows of Harvard College and the Pluralism Project" (2020)
Article: "Women's Ministry in the Church"
From: the research studies' "The Pluralism Project" from the Harvard University which aims to interpret religious diversity and interfaith relations in the United States
Website link for the article: https://pluralism.org/women%E2%80%99s-ministry-in-the-church

[17] – Kim Stanley Robinson (2019)
Article: "Anarchism's Possibilities"
From: the grant-giving organisation for radical writes and translators worldwide "the Institute for Anarchist Studies" supporting the development of anarchism
Website link for the article: https://anarchiststudies.org/10685-2/

[18] – Jazmin Tolliver (2022)
Article: "Pope Francis Condemns Abortions Again, Compares Them To "Hiring A Hit Man'"
From: the news website "Yahoo! News"
Website link for the article: https://www.yahoo.com/news/pope-francis-condemns-abortions-again-210312394.html

IV.3 The significance of spirituality and its essential association to ideological, philosophical and political reflections

- **Socio-egalitarian movement's views on religion and spirituality**

[1] – Emma Seppälä (2016)
Article: "The Surprising Health Benefits of Spirituality"
From: the mental health and behavioural science website "Psychology Today"
Website link for the article: https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/feeling-it/201608/the-surprising-health-benefits-spirituality

[2] – J-P Mauro (2019)
Article: "Study shows religion and spirituality are beneficial for those at risk of depression"
From: the Christian online publication website "Aleteia"
Website link for the article: https://aleteia.org/2019/02/05/study-shows-religion-and-spirituality-are-beneficial-for-those-at-risk-of-depression/
Website link to the study results: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/brb3.1209

[3] – Karl Thompson (2018)
Article: "Religion and Social Change – Functionalists and Marxists argue religion prevents change, Max Weber and others disagree!"
From: the free revision resources website "ReviseSociology.com" for A-level sociology students
Website link for the article: https://revisesociology.com/2018/08/09/religion-and-social-change/
Cited in: part IV.3 – [3], [6]

[4] – Jean-Claude Guillebaud (2017)
Book: "Comment je suis redevenue chrétien" ("How I became Christian again"), Albin Michel, Paris
At: p.87-87 (ISBN 978-2-7578-5314-6)
Website link for a description of the book: https://biblio.co.uk/book/comment-je-suis-redevenu-chratien-guillebaud/d/1112353889

[5] – Mariusz Sulkowshi (2020)
Article: "The concept of progress as a secular counterpart of the Divine Providence – a take on the political Gnosis of Eric Voegelin"
From: the "Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University" in Warsaw, on the independent social initiative of scholars' website "Eastern Humanist Yearbook"
PDF link for the article: http://www.wrh.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/011_WRH_17_4_wrh_2020_no4_Sulkowski.pdf

[6] – Karl Thompson (2018)
See source: part IV.3 – [3]

[7] – John Malkin (2003)
Article: "In Engaged Buddhism, Peace Begins with You"
From: the independent non-profit foundation the "Lions's Roar" whose mission is to communicate Buddhist wisdom and practices in the world
Website link for the article: https://www.lionsroar.com/in-engaged-buddhism-peace-begins-with-you/
Cited in: part IV.3 – [7]; part IV.4 [34]

- **Philosophical and political grids to understand the world**

[8] – Ken Sanes (1996-2013)
Article: "The Deconstruction of Reality: What Modernism and Postmodernism Say About Surface and Depth"
From: the private website "Welcome to Transparency" 'that tries to make things clear'
Website link for the article: https://www.transparencynow.com/decon.htm
Cited in: part IV.3 – [8]; part IV.4 – [20]

[9] – Michael Peters (1999)
Article: "(Posts-) Modernism and Structuralism: Affinities and Theoretical Innovations"
From: the online-only peer-reviewed Sociology journal "Sociological Research Online"
Website link for the article: https://www.socresonline.org.uk/4/3/peters.html

Cited in: part IV.3 – [9]; part IV.4 – [21]

- **More tolerance, less ego and more empathy in socio-egalitarian fights**

[10] – Hara Estroff Marano (2003) – *last reviewed in 2016*
Article: "The Downside of Anger"
From: the mental health and behavioural science website "Psychology Today"
Website link for the article: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200307/the-downside-anger

[11] – LaVelle Hendricks, Sam Bore, Dean Aslinia and Guy Morriss (2013)
Article: "The Effects of Anger on the Brain and Body"
From: the "National Forum Journal of Counselling and Addiction" the scholarly, refered, peer reviewed, professional journal "National Forum Journals"
PDF link for the article:
http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Hendricks,%20LaVelle%20The%20Effects%20of%20Anger%20on%20the%20Brain%20and%20Body%20NFJCA%20V2%20N1%202013.pdf

[12] – Steve Rose (2020)
Article: "How the word 'woke' was weaponised by the right"
From: The British news and media website "The Guardian"
Website link for the article: https://www.theguardian.com/society/shortcuts/2020/jan/21/how-the-word-woke-was-weaponised-by-the-right

- **Less ego and binary, and more listening and empathy**

[13] – Edward W. Said (1979)
See source: part IV.1 – [11]

[14] – Preston Grant (2014)
Article: "The LGBTQQIAAP (or LGBTTIQQ2SA) Community, and Why"
From: the private blog "gayexplained.com"
Website link for the article: https://gayexplained.com/lgbtqqiaap-community/

[15] – Rita D. Sherma (2022)
Article: "The Links Between Spirituality and Climate Change"
From: the non-profit, independent publisher of 'solutions' journalism "YES! Media"
Website link for the article: https://www.yesmagazine.org/environment/2022/03/15/religion-spirituality-climate-change

IV.4 Some lessons from Buddhism

[1a] [1b] – Thich Nhat Hanh (1995)
Book: "Living Buddha, Living Christ", Riverhead books, New York

At: p.10-11 (page in the book digitalised on the website)
Website link for the book: https://archive.org/details/livingbuddhalivi0000unse/page/n9/mode/2up

[2] – David Loy (1996)
Article: "Beyond good and evil? A Buddhist critique of Nietzsche"
From: the "Digital Library of Buddhist Studies" of the "National Taiwan University" with "Asian Philosophy"
Website link for the article: http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-ENG/loy1.htm
Cited in: part IV.4 – [2], [14], [16]

[3] – Winston L. King (1970)
Article: "Eastern Religions: A New Interest and Influence"
From: "the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" on the digital library 'for the intellectually curious' "JSTOR"
At: p.66-76
Website link for an abstract of the article: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1036739

- **Interdependent co-arising, impermanence and emptiness**

[4] – Lee Kane (2017)
Article: "Dependent Co-Arising Answers Most Arguments with Impeccable Logic: The Great Causes Discourse Maha-nidana Sutta"
From: the non-profit association "Buddha Weekly"
Website link for the article: https://buddhaweekly.com/understanding-dependent-co-arising-critical-buddhist-practice-great-causes-discourse-maha-nidana-sutta/

[5] – Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer (2010)
Book: "Buddhist Warfare", Oxford University Press, USA
Website link to a description of the book: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6745496-buddhist-warfare

[6] – Peter Shadbolt (2013)
Article: "Conflict in Buddhism: 'Violence for the sake of peace?'
From: the American international News media "CNN"
Website link for the article: https://edition.cnn.com/2013/04/22/world/asia/buddhism-violence/index.html

[7] – Creator of "Buddhism Info"
Article: "Buddhism Basics: The Law of Dependent Origination"
From: the private Buddhism website "Buddhism Info"
Website link for the article: https://buddhism.info/buddhism-basics-the-law-of-dependent-origination/

[8] – "Shiva" (2019)

Article: "Buddhism and emptiness"
From: the website "Buddhists.org"
Website link for the article: https://buddhists.org/buddhism-and-emptiness/

[9] – Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche with Helen Tworkov (2019)
Book: "In love with the world – A Monk's Journey Through the Bardos of Living and Dying", Random House, New York
At: p.32-33 (ISBN 9780525512547)
Website link to a description of the book: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/41429805-in-love-with-the-world
Cited in: part IV.4 – [9], [23], [35]

- **Detachment from concepts and dogmas**

[10] – Contributors to the website
Article: "Does Goes Exist? A Story of Buddha"
From: the website "Free Spiritual Growth Events"
Website link for the article: https://spiritualgrowthevents.com/does-god-exist-a-story-of-buddha-buddhist-zen-story/

[11] – "The Conscious Reminder Team" (2017)
Article: "If you meet the Buddha on the road, "kill him""
From: the website "Conscious Reminder" attempting 'to offer a different approach to the art of living'
Website link for the article: https://consciousreminder.com/2017/01/01/meet-buddha-road-kill/

[12] – Thich Nhat Hanh (1991)
Book: "Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha", Parallax Press
Quoted from: the site for readers and book recommendations "Goodreads"
Website link for the quote: https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/843488-bhikkhus-the-teaching-is-merely-a-vehicle-to-describe-the
Cited in: part IV.4 [12], [29]

[13] – Thich Nhat Hanh (2014)
Article: "Does hell exist? Thich Nhat Hanh answers questions"
From: the American online video sharing and social media platform "YouTube"
Website link for the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pMYebbFUeo

[14] – Friedrich Nietzsche (1968) – *first published in 1895*
Book: "Twilight of the Idols and the Antichrist", Harmondsworth, Penguin
Translated and edited by: R. J. Hollingdale
At: p.129 – section 20
Quoted from the source: David Loy (1996) – part IV.4 – [2]

[15] – SparkNotes Editors" (2005)

See source: part III.2 – [6];

[16] – David Loy (1996)
See source: part IV.4 – [2]

[17] – Charles Taylor (1984)
Article: "Foucault on Freedom and Truth"
From the book: "Political Theory", SAGE
On: the digital library 'for the intellectually curious' "JSTOR"
At: p.152-183
Website link for an extract of the article: https://www.jstor.org/stable/191359

[18]– Contributors to "URI"
Article: "Buddhism: Basic Beliefs"
From: the global grassroots interfaith network "United Religions Initiative – URI"
Website link for the article: https://www.uri.org/kids/world-religions/buddhist-beliefs

[19] – Answer by "virmaior" (2018)
Article: "Is there a relation between postmodernism and Asian philosophies"
From: the network of question and answer websites "Stack Exchange"
Website link for the article: https://philosophy.stackexchange.com/questions/50915/is-there-a-relation-between-postmodernism-and-asian-philosophies

[20] – Ken Sanes (1996-2013)
See source in: part IV.3 – [8]

[21] – Michael Peters (1999)
See source in: part IV.3 – [9]

[22] – Tchich Nhat Hanh (2021)
Article: "Love & Compassion in Buddhism"
From: the blog part of the craftsmanship online shop "Himalayas Shop"
Website link for the article: https://www.himalayasshop.com/blogs/blogs/love-compassion-in-buddhism

[23] – Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche with Helen Tworkov (2019)
See source in: part IV.4 – [9] – p.106

- **Practical spirituality – meditation**

[24] – Aldous Huxley (1962)
Book: "Island", HarperCollins, New York
Website link for a description of the book: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/5130.Island

[25] – "the Buddhist centre" contributors

Article: "What is meditation?"
From: the 'Right Livelihood' charity "the Buddhist centre"
Website link for the article: https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/what-meditation

[26] – "Whoisidentiy" contributors (2022)
Article: "Nothingness as Explained by Buddha in Buddhism with Story"
From: the information and education online platform "Whoisidentity"
Website link for the article: https://whoisidentity.com/nothingness/

[27] – Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche (2022)
Video: "Can Meditation Be Dangerous"
From: the American online video sharing and social media platform "YouTube"
Website link for the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VzeYD2VY5o

[28] – Shōhaku Okumura (2017)
Video: "Zazen is Good for Nothing"
From: the American online video sharing and social media platform "YouTube"
Website link for the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8T-Z1WoFXkk

[29] – Thich Nhat Hanh (1991)
See source: part IV.4 – [12]

[30] – Paul Condon, Gaëlle Desbordes, Willa B. Miller and David DeSteno (2013)
Report: "Meditation Increases Compassionate Responses to Suffering"
From: the American independent publishing company "SAGE Journals"
Website link for the article:
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956797613485603?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori%3Arid%3Acrossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub++0pubmed&

[31] – Chris Niebaur (2019)
Book: "No Self, No Problem: How Neuropsychology Is Catching Up to Buddhism", Hierophant Publishing
Website link for a description of the book: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/44442944-no-self-no-problem

[32] – Victor Hori (1994)
Article: "Sweet and Sour Buddhism"
From: the non-profit educational organisation "The Tricycle Foundation" dedicated to making Buddhist teachings an practices broadly available
Website link for the article: https://tricycle.org/magazine/sweet-and-sour-buddhism/

[33] – Chögyam Trungpa (2002)
Book: "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism", Shambhala
Website link for the article:
https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/295000.Cutting_Through_Spiritual_Materialism

[34] – John Malkin (2003)
See source: part IV.4 – [7]

[35] – Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche with Helen Tworkov (2019)
See source: part IV.4 – [9] – p.104-105

V. Conclusion

[1] – Robin Dunbar (1992)
Article: "Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates", Journal of Human Evolution
At: p.497-493
Website link for the article:
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/004724849290081J
Quoted in the book: "L'Entraide – l'autre loi de la jungle" ("Mutual Aid – the other law of the jungle"), Les liens qui libèrent
At: p.147 (ISBN 9791020904508)
Website link for a description of the book: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36690231-l-entraide

[2] – Sean Illing (2018)"
Article: "The alt-right is drunk on bad readings of Nietzsche. The Nazis were too."
From: the American news and opinion website "Vox News"
Website link for the article: https://www.vox.com/2017/8/17/16140846/alt-right-nietzsche-richard-spencer-nazism

[3] – Pablo Servigne and Gauthier Chapelle (2017)
Book: "L'Entraide – l'autre loi de la jungle" ("Mutual Aid – the other law of the jungle"), Les liens qui libèrent
At : p.157 (ISBN 9791020904508)
Website link for a description of the book: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36690231-l-entraide