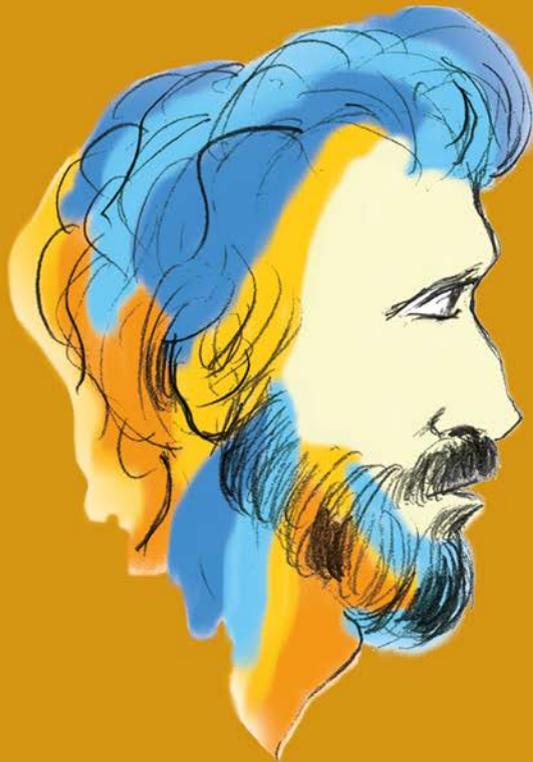


Dorothy Figueira (ed.)

Rebuilding the Profession

Comparative Literature, Intercultural Studies and
the Humanities in the Age of Globalization





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Reflections on (In)Humanity

Volume 10

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Comparative Literature, Intercultural Studies and
the Humanities in the Age of Globalization

Essays in Honor of Mihai I. Spariosu

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Chapter 12: Theses on Poor Faith

In 2005 the American priest and theologian Matthew Fox attached a list of ninety-five theses he had composed to the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany, theses proclaiming a renewal of Christianity in the twenty-first century. In doing this, he re-enacted what Martin Luther had done, pinning his theses to the very same church door in the year 1517 and, thereby, setting in motion the Reformation.

I resort to the same form of theses for the very reason that they provide the most succinct means of setting out ideas which belong to a worldview still in the process of formation. These theses bring together much that I have already written on the subject of minimal religion since the beginning of the 1980s, at which time signs of its emergence became evident in the spiritual life of late-Soviet, post-atheist society.¹

On 21 December 2014, I pinned these Theses to the internal side of the “door of theses” in All-Saints Church in Wittenberg.

What is Poor Faith?

1. Poor faith is faith without religion, without any temples, dogma or rites. It is a direct orientation towards God, here and now, and one-to-one. This is a faith as integrally standing before God as God Himself is integral and undivided.

2. There is a need for faith that stirs inside the human being who hears the voice of God within his or her soul. People search for faith, but encounter only a range of particular religions. Poor faith arises precisely in the space between faith and religions. Simply faith. Simply faith in God.

3. One ought to distinguish between faith and religion. When faith becomes surrounded by institutions, dogma and traditions, it becomes religion. There-

¹ A more detailed treatment of this whole problematic is set out in my book *Religion after Atheism: New Possibilities for Theology* (Moscow: AST-P, 2013).

fore ‘poor religion’ or ‘minimal religion’ is simply faith in God without any admixture of ‘confessional’ definitions.

4. Hence we get such a critical stance towards ‘religion’ as distinct from ‘faith,’ even on the part of theologians such as Karl Barth: “Religion forgets that it has a right to exist only when it continually refutes itself. Instead of doing that, it rejoices at its own existence and regards itself as irreplaceable.” Such a complacent religion, seeking its own triumph within the world, is the very opposite of the essence of faith, which, by its very nature, is ‘*not* of this world.’

5. According to the results of the largest sociological survey of opinions involving 56,900 respondents and carried out by the ‘Sreda’ research centre in Russia, one in four people fall into the category of ‘poor religion’—that is to say, a simple belief in God without any affiliation to a belief system or denomination. This proportion, 25 %, comes second only to Orthodox Christian believers (41 %) and exceeds Muslims (6.5 %).²

6. The growth of supra-confessional awareness is a worldwide tendency. According to data from the Pew Research Center (USA, 2012), the ‘extra-confessional’ (religiously non-aligned) population of the world makes up 1.1 billion people (or 16 % of the total world population.). In China that is 52 % of its population, or 700 million, and in the USA 20 %, or 46 million. These figures include atheists and agnostics. However, the proportion of believers among these ‘religious nones’ is very considerable: 7 % in China, 30 % in France, and 68 % in the USA affirm that they do believe in God (and 10 % of those pray every day).³

7. The concept of ‘poor faith,’ or ‘minimal religion,’ first arose at the beginning of the 1980s in Moscow. It can be compared to the notion of ‘poor theatre’ developed by the Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski. His theatre was completely devoid of scenery, adornment and costumes.

8. In the religious context the word ‘poor’ has a strong positive connotation, as in ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit.’ The adherents to ‘poor faith’ do not possess any symbolic ‘capital’ in the form of generally recognised and specific denominational traditions, church buildings, socially recognised prestige or ‘image.’ Poverty is a Christian virtue, which one could use as a measure for judging Christianity itself and its dogmatic wealth.

² See <http://sreda.org/arena>.

³ “Religiously Unaffiliated” in “The Global Religious Landscape” (report), *Pew Research Center*, December 18, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-unaffiliated>; “Nones’ on the Rise” (report), *Pew Research Center*, October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise>; Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, “American Religious Identification Survey [ARIS 2008]: Summary Report,” March 2009, https://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf.

9. Poor faith is rooted right in the world, in our need to link life with absolute meaning. Any person with poor faith converses directly with God within the depth of his or her own soul. It is impossible to root out such poor faith, for its temple exists in every home and in every soul.

10. When applied to the realm of faith, the word 'poor' has the following synonyms: *free, direct, living, open, creative*.

11. Poor faith corresponds to apophatic theology that denies the possibility of knowing God or conceiving of Him in positive forms, symbols or definitions.

This faith lives beyond the boundary of all faith systems.

Atheism and the Barriers between Religions

12. In Russia poor faith was the consequence of seven decades of atheism. By rejecting all religious confessions at a single stroke, militant atheism created a favourable setting for the emergence of 'religion in general.' It was precisely the faithlessness of the Soviet years that formed the kind of person who could only be defined as a 'believer.'

13. The first instances of 'poor faith' within the Soviet Union were to be found in the 1960s when the religion of Communism was becoming desiccated and when a period of political hopelessness was approaching. This was a faith and a hope that arose from nowhere: "*From the depth do I cry out unto Thee, O Lord.*"

14. In the course of the decades such a desert took hold of the spiritual life of the country that the borderlines separating the various denominations were in effect obliterated. "A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord" (Isaiah 40, 3–5). Soviet atheism extended the space for the gathering of various faiths so that "all flesh" and humankind could discern the breath of divine spirit.

15. An important feature of faith is the dialectical relationship between induction into the life of the Church and disengagement from the Church, between entry into the historical and denominational body of religion and distancing from it.

16. The 'trans-religious' is not only a 'going out' beyond the boundaries of historically formed religions, but also beyond *religion as such*. The 'trans-religious' is Christ prior to Christianity, i. e. the stage of faith before religion, or Christ after Christianity, Christ in apocalyptic times, the stage of faith after religion. Thus, faith constantly brings forth a crisis in religion and then supersedes it, in the form of an instant impoverishment, an 'emptying out' of the wealth accrued in the long course of history.

17. If we consider just Russian instances of the phenomenon, then Lev Tolstoy, Daniil Andreyev, and Grigoriy Pomerants all represent various versions and stages of this movement towards the 'trans-religious.' Tolstoy represents the discovery of 'trans-religious' space in its pure form, as critique of the Church. Andreyev sees the trans-religious as a means of gathering together all the his-

torical forms of religion in a supra-historical unity, “the Rose of the World.” For Pomerants, the ‘trans-religious’ amounts to the individual’s existential experience of contact with various religions.

18. There is another, fourth, path, which is that of poor faith. It is a minimalist, not a maximalist, extension of religious openness. Poor faith is not only a post-atheistic but also trans-religious consciousness.

19. Poor faith does not criticise specific beliefs and belief systems, but rather, from the position of a complete toleration of faiths, it signifies openness towards their revelations, their spiritual beauty, their historical meaning and searching, not indifference towards these.

20. Poor faith is an entirely immanent life that has just one transcendent ‘signified’—the person of God. This constitutes the maximum degree of ‘the immanent’ and the minimum degree of ‘the transcendent.’

God as Person

21. Poor faith is a faith in God as Person. Human personhood is the most complex, deep and creative reality that we can know with true certainty as it is open to us from within. Therefore it is reasonable to presuppose that at the very core of the world there exists not only an impersonal law or an abstract formula, but certain personhood and creativity, by virtue of which we ourselves are not merely objects of a physical world, but also subjects of a world that is psychic and moral.

22. A typical argument put forward by Positivists goes something like this:

“I acknowledge the passing of an electrical current because that can be picked up by instruments. But how can one pick up God and his emanations?” Listen and look within. Love, hope, fear, compassion, repentance, inner work on ourselves—all of these are His passing through us, no less certain or reliable than is electricity passing along wires.

23. One property of Reason is to generalise, to discern regular laws underpinning the varied array of phenomena. The world of objects has its own foundation, in the form of objective laws observed and investigated by science. In exactly the same way our reason, upon discovering a multiplicity of human persons, cannot fail to reach the conclusion that there is a source of subjectivity that is common to all of them. Being the source of internal life and of any subjectivity whatsoever, this source itself cannot *not* be Subject. It acts from within us, just as the law of universal gravity operates externally to us.

24. The Kingdom of God cannot be found outside us, for it is within us. God is this Universal I, which internally unites all persons capable of self-reflection.

Experiencing our own 'I' as 'I,' at the same time we enter a reciprocal relationship with the 'I' of this Universal Being.

25. Our most reliable personal experience of being ourselves, together with the generalizing activity of reason, leads us to a concept of God as All-Person, to which each conscious creature relates through its own 'I,' through the activity of its own conscience, feeling and will.

26. Faith in the Universal I accords as much with reason, as does a physicist's faith in the existence of elementary particles, waves and fields, or a biologist's faith in the existence of cells and organisms. In essence, religion and science do not mutually exclude one another. At the heart of each of them lies the work of reason, the ability to discern the general in the particular. Science cannot refuse religion the right to make generalizations on the basis of internal states of being experienced by various persons and to link them to the existence of Person.

27. In response to Moses's question about His name, God answers: "I am who I am" (Exodus 3, 14). The being of God should be conceived in the first, not in the third person. It is expressed similarly in other religious traditions too. In Hinduism, the *Atman* is depicted as the boundless and non-transient 'I' of all beings. Within the Sufi tradition, the poet Rumi has written: "I long sought God among the Christians, but He was not on the Cross; when in a Hindu temple and in a Buddhist monastery, I did not find even traces of Him there; then I looked into my own heart, and there I discerned God, who was nowhere other than there."

28. "I" is a pronoun that is common to God and humans. The person's 'I' is *greater* than their self, for it is supra-personal. As Fichte puts it: "Such is each of us who can say to himself 'I am a person.' Must not he experience a feeling of sacred piety in the presence of his I?" This is not an egocentric sense of grandeur on man's part, but the greatness of that very 'I' which he shares with God.

29. With his call to a new Reformation within Christianity, Matthew Fox begins his ninety-five Theses with the following affirmations:

"1. God is both Mother and Father.

2. At this time in history, God is more Mother than Father because the feminine is most missing and it is important to bring back gender balance."

These assertions of feminist theology are not true, just as assertions of the masculine principle are untrue. With God gender does not pertain. God is not 'he,' 'she' or 'it.' God is 'I,' for all subjects, for all feeling and thinking beings which have an 'I.' 'I' does not possess the morphological properties of gender.

Science

30. Science is called to bring about the intellectual unity of humankind and, consequently, to enhance the role of poor faith that transcends the boundaries of religions.

31. Contemporary science is steadily liberating itself from Positivism and reductionism, and its present discoveries are consonant with fundamental features of a religious picture of the world. The universe does have limits in terms of time and space (as affirmed by the 'Big Bang' theory); at the heart of all living existence there is Logos (information); observations of the physical Universe must be compatible with the conscious life that observes it (the anthropic principle in cosmology).

32. From the perspective of atheism, the more powerful humankind is, the less it will be disposed to belief in a Creator. From the perspective of theism, the spread of human knowledge and power over nature can indeed strengthen our belief in God. Our very ability to create more and more refined artificial (virtual, computer-based) worlds presupposes an increasing probability that the natural world too has a creator.

33. Humankind's direction of travel is not from belief to unbelief, but from belief to knowledge. The time has already come to speak of *religious knowledge*, not merely of the religiousness of faith. The time of *cognitive religion* has arrived, a time when cognitivism will play the very same role as fideism used to play in the past.

34. The scientific thesis according to which a Big Bang led to the creation of the universe is not just the basis of a physical theory, but also of religious knowledge. The anthropic principle, according to which the universe was specifically designed for human habitation, is a matter of religious knowledge. Faith draws on many arguments in modern science; it no longer places itself in contradiction to science, but assimilates or incorporates it.

Theology of Resurrection

35. Faith remains as faith only when it loses its doctrinal and institutional guarantees and enters the dimension of limitless risk and free creativity. Atheism is a rejection of religion, partly necessary for the sake of faith itself, as a way of its renovation and purification.

36. After 'the death of God,' proclaimed by Nietzsche, and also by Marx and Freud, and after the mass movements of Communism and atheism in the twentieth century, we get 'the resurrection of God as a post-atheistic appre-

hension of life. In 1917, Russia was the first to embark on mass atheism and, in the 1970s, the first to enter the post-atheistic era.

37. The ‘theology of the death of God’ represents a profound paradox, assigning a new significance to death as a constructive and life-affirming experience. To assign theological significance to the death of God means to respond to His Crucifixion as to something offering the possibility of defying death.

38. Distinct in its nature from the Protestant theology of ‘the death of God,’ poor faith makes a next step and presupposes a theology not of death and not simply of life, but of resurrection, a *dual* life, whose intensity is strengthened by suffering and sacrifice. Life after resurrection differs from life before death; it is enhanced by the personal death of Christ on the Cross, and by the historical death of Christianity in the twentieth century. This is an abundance of new being which follows death and resurrection.

39. ‘That which has resurrected’ differs from ‘that which has not died.’ This is not simply a restoration of a previous form of life, but an entry into a new life, a superior life. The post-atheistic theology of resurrection is a theology of the new life of God beyond the limits of His historical and ecclesiastical body. The ‘zero degrees’ point of faithlessness and godlessness has passed, and a new growth of faith is beginning, a theological ‘making sense of’ and overcoming of atheism itself.

40. The theology of resurrection reveals God as being concealed. Isaiah’s prophecy about the Messiah: “There is in Him no form or majesty” (Isa. 53: 2–3). From the very beginning, the atheistic stage: “We turned our faces away from Him”—paves the way for poor faith that is directed towards the poverty of divine manifestations, towards the absence of form and majesty.

41. Poor faith relates to traditional religions much as avant-garde art relates to Realism. Faith attaches to the very collapse of realistic representation that vanishes beyond the limit of what can be observed. The resurrected Christ becomes invisible precisely at the point when He has become known to His apostles.

42. The history of the life, death, and resurrection of God is the history of each soul that passes through its own Garden of Gethsemane, its own anguish and exhaustion—and through its own Golgotha.

43. Inasmuch as we can experience within ourselves the life of God, it consists of cycles of dying and resurrection. There is no life as such that is self-identical and self-sufficient; there is a sequence of deaths and resurrections.

Paths of God and Theodicy

44. The God of poor faith is not all-powerful, for He represents *effort*, which continues to create the world. Just as our Universe broadens out in observable space, so God broadens out His action in the internal space to be found within

individuals and in humankind, finding an ever-new extension of His own powers. It is said: “Let the will of God be accomplished in all” (1 Cor. 15: 28). God acts in the world and in us as an infinitely growing effort that has not reached the limit of ‘the all.’

45. If the process of creation is still under way, the Creator is also changing along with it, like a writer, as he creates his various works, discovers something new within himself and is at times surprised by the actions of the characters which he creates. “What a trick Leonardo played there!” Or Newton played, or Darwin or Freud.

46. The path of man to God and the path of God to man—these are different paths which do not always come together at one point, nor even meet each other, as, for instance, the hand of God and the hand of man in Michelangelo’s fresco. Job had established a path of righteousness and piety, yet God awaited him in a wholly different place.

47. The *labour* of the Creator and the *freedom* of His creations—right here is a *dual* presupposition for the existence of evil in this world.

48. The God of poor faith is a poor God, suffering and dying *together* with all that is alive. The problem of theodicy, the justification of God in the face of the suffering that He permits, is resolved in the context of *the mutual suffering of Creator and His creation*.

49. The suffering of innocent people is not a retribution, but an indispensable condition of the life which humankind shares with God and which God shares with humankind. If a child is born sickly, the suffering of the parents is even stronger, because they see in him their own image distorted by illness, and they understand that the child is destined for a life full of torments. The suffering of God is even stronger than that of man.

The Theology and Ethics of Singularity

50. Poor faith does not lead to pantheism. God is not in everything, but in each thing, in the *each-ness* of all things, in their distinction from one another. Each thing is unique only because God Himself is unique, and each thing is akin to God (theomorphic) precisely by virtue of its *uniqueness*.

51. Theology is concerned with that which is singular—this is its specific subject matter. Theology is charged to speak about the whole infinite variety of phenomena in their uniqueness, that is to say, in their likeness to God.

52. The distinguishing mark of the Kingdom of God is its smallness: “The Kingdom of God is like unto a mustard seed, which a man takes and sows in his field, Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants” (Matt. 13: 31–32)

53. Every one of us has our own mustard seed, and it grows into the biggest. If my crying child calls on me, I must go and console him. If some thought comes to maturity in the philosopher, or if some image, picture or symbol takes shape within the artist, then he must articulate it, embody it and share it with others, and then the Kingdom will grow from his mustard seed. Just as, at its deepest level, the physical universe consists of the most minute particles, so the Kingdom of God grows out of the very smallest seeds, from particles of love, goodness, service to others, and giving-of-self.

54. Poor faith focuses on the unique-and-very-smallest element as a point of break-through to the Creator. Precisely by refraining from a focus on rites and specific manifestations of religion, the entire world perception of the 'poor believer' becomes 'theologised.' Intensification of religious feeling takes him beyond confessional frameworks.

55. Theomorphism is the variety of hidden manifestations of the Creator in His creations and in our way of apprehending them. There is no being at all, not a single thing, which is not, in some aspect or relation an image of God and, consequently, which could not be the subject of a veiled love of God.

56. God can be loved through action or inaction, beauty and ugliness, food and hunger. For the poor believer everything becomes a sign of His presence, of His directedness towards me. This is not simply a case of theocentrism, but, rather, of theomorphism: the art of discerning God in every thing that is *not* Him.

57. Theology speaks using the language of subjects and objects, whereas it needs to master the language of predicates. To *verbify* the language of theology is to *activate* the being of God. The essence of God remains hidden, but His energy becomes apparent to us and acts upon us. Thus, it is more appropriate to convey this active element in God by using a verb rather than a noun: to render god-wise, to "godwise," to act in the manner of God. Whatever he sees: a tree, a lake, a human being—"godwises" in the eyes of a poor believer. Verbs convey the energy of divine action while maintaining a discreet and knowing silence regarding the Originator of this action.

58. The ethics of poor faith consist of 'neighbour-feeling' and 'neighbour-thought.' That is to say, first and foremost a person "godwises" the reality immediately surrounding him or her, gradually extending that sphere of spiritual action. This stands and acts counter to that 'love for the distant one,' which operated in the ethical framework promoted by atheism and totalitarianism.

59. The prophetic tradition became extinguished a long time ago, and there are no longer any human lips that could be the means whereby God announces Himself. The lengthy silence of God—during the whole period of Auschwitz and the Gulag—has led people to the thought that He simply doesn't exist. Yet, having ceased hearing the word of God, people have ended up standing within the

hearing of God. It prepares people for the last judgment, when they will speak and respond, while the Judge will listen and decide.

The Theology of Creativity

60. The principal commandments of the Bible were given to man immediately after his creation and prior to the Fall: 1/ 'Go forth and multiply and fill the earth'; 2/ 'Such as man names every living creature, so let it be named.' To endow life and to endow names –these are humankind's two principal callings, the first of these applied in the realm of nature and the second, in the realm of culture. These affirmative commandments are superior to the ten predominantly negative or prohibitive commandments given to 'fallen' man through Moses.

61. The goal of life and, consequently, the means of justifying man before God is the multiplying of the talents given to him. Man acquits himself before God not only by what he has refrained from doing (not sinning, not killing, not stealing, not fornicating), but also by what he has done—creating, building, embodying, discovering and inventing. That which is common to all gifts is that, when they are given to man, they are incomplete and they need to be multiplied or completed.

62. There is no religion and no Church that actually goes so far as to ask its adherents how much they have multiplied the talents which God gave them. Writers are not asked how well they write, nor are doctors asked how effectively they cure people. This range of questions belongs, rather, to the very place where the person, the creator, stands directly before the Creator. The Parable of the Talents may be considered as a key to poor faith.

Pop-Religion and Theocracy

63. Substitution of God is much more blasphemous than hostility towards Him. On the subject of the Antichrist, the New Testament has this to say: "He shall sit in the temple of God, like God, presenting himself as God." At that time they will not reject religion, nor struggle with it, but will force it to bless all human affairs, placing priests on councils of industrialists and speculators. In this way, no enterprise can be embarked on without God, not even swindling, stealing or killing.

64. A distinctive kind of popular religion (or pop-religion) is arising, a response to mass demand, religion as a means of ideological pressure on society and of commercial gain. Observing the religious renaissance of atheistic society, we will ask ourselves: Won't straightforward godlessness be replaced by a cun-

ning form of piety which already has no reason or cause to struggle with faith for it is easier and more advantageous to imitate it?

65. The atheism of the twentieth century transmutes into a theocracy of the twenty-first century. Any theocracy, any ecclesiastical power 'bestowed by God's name and according to His decree' is dangerous inasmuch as it contains within it a more refined version of atheism than is shown by the person who takes a direct stand against religion. If God is unable to deal with His own tasks, then it becomes necessary to put Him right: the Grand Inquisitor's 'project.' Atheism and theocracy turn out to be two sides of the same coin.

66. The danger of such substitutions can be well understood by people, whose religious feelings in part become offended by clericalism and fundamentalism. For them poor faith becomes an attractive alternative to any 'organised' and 'organising' religion.

67. Affiliation to a specific denomination may create an illusion of spiritual well-being or an apparent guarantee of salvation by going along the well-trodden path. But that itself increases the danger of Phariseeism.

68. If religion or religious hierarchs stir up aggression in society and malice and intolerance—such a faith is close to obscurantism, or sacromania. Devoutly believing people may be ready to imprison and punish others in the interests of defending what they conceive to be 'sacred.' Aggression needs to be poured out, and it finds an advantageous-seeming pretext in 'the sacred.' "Why do you so hate Americans, Europeans, Jews, Catholics, liberals, volunteers, oppositionists, sexual minorities?"—"It is not for our own part or sake, but for God!" In this way, a hysterically worked-up faith becomes an instrument of hatred.

69. In the contemporary world, two tendencies can be observed: 1/ a strengthening of militant forms of confessionalism, of clerical and fundamentalist movements, and 2/ a growth in poor faith and other forms of trans-religious and supra-confessional awareness, forms that are able to unite people above the level of all ethnic and religious barriers. A distinguishing feature of this post-secular age is the polarization of these two tendencies. Religion is acquiring a new significance, both as an instrument for political struggle and also as the path of a new spiritual unification of the world. Therefore, we find the growing significance of 'poor faith' as a path towards inter-confessional understanding and unity.

70. The struggle between faith and religion constitutes the spiritual tension and the inner conflict of our time experienced by many believers. Disillusionment with the symbiosis of Church and corrupt power structures ("religarchy") may push society yet further and closer towards 'poor faith.'

71. If we experience disillusion with the politically conformist, morally doubtful and commercially greedy manifestations of 'pop-religion,' then it is all

the more natural to transfer our faith to the Creator Himself rather than to renounce faith altogether.

72. The majority of our contemporaries are not really confronted with the question ‘To believe or not to believe?’ Rather, the question is framed this way: ‘Is your faith church-based or not-church-based?’ or ‘Is your faith based on rites or not based on rites?’ There is a time for gathering stones and a time for taking stones apart, including the stones of the temple within your own soul. The history of humankind, as well as the history of each soul, is not only a struggle of faith with faithlessness, but also a struggle of faith with religion.

The Dynamics of Poor Faith

73. Henri Bergson distinguishes between static religions and dynamic religions, identifying those which reproduce stable stereotypes for behaviour and support stability in society and those which are based on man’s experience of direct communication with God.

74. Poor faith is not a constant and self-identical spiritual condition. It has many levels and many stages. It moves from a state of naivety to a state of reflexion, from a pre-confessional stage to a supra-confessional stage. Pre-confessional faith lacks any knowledge and experience of specific religious confessions or denominations, whereas supra-confessional faith attempts to reach beyond their boundaries.

75. The initial stage of poor faith is a non-reflective “I believe in Something” / “I believe in Someone,” which constitutes the first step in distinguishing oneself from non-believers.

76. The second stage comes in the form of an attraction to mystical yearnings, esotericism as popularly understood: spiritualism, theosophy, yoga and folk superstitions.

77. The third stage consists of a parallel or subsequent affiliation to one or several confessions, an experience of interaction between them, participation in their mysteries, and a full or partial induction into church life.

78. The fourth stage is that of disillusionment in organised and ritual forms of religion and their dogmatic nature, commercialization, politicization, and their confluence with state power. This is the stage of *dis*-engagement from church, and of the individual person’s aspiration to find support in a direct standing before God.

79. The fifth stage is that of a conscious faith outside the confines of religious confession, a faith enriched by varied spiritual experience and encounters with various belief systems, holy scriptures, teachings and traditions.

80. Poor faith is a path of spiritual becoming which can pass by and through other stages and in a different order from that outlined above.

81. Poor faith can arise within specific religious confessions as an aspiration to feel the living spirit beyond the outwardly petrified forms. The fire of faith is common to all religions; national and historical forms vary in the ways that this fire of the spirit becomes cold.

82. Is poor faith compatible with participation in the mysteries and rites of the various religions? This question does not have one identical answer for all. It is for each person to gauge for herself or himself the extent to which their own faith is poor.

83. Poor faith does not adhere to old dogmas, nor creates new ones. Rather, it takes the traditions of various religions as raw material for constructing its own personal experience. It is work and effort expended on the creation of one's own soul in collaboration with God. Just as an artist creates her or his own canvas, using a plethora of lines and colours, so the poor believer creates his own faith, employing those forms and meanings that are accessible through the whole legacy received from previous testimonies and revelations of faith.

84. Poor faith can go through crises, through 'dark nights of the soul,' and lack all forms of support other than its own efforts to further set down its path towards God.

85. Just as various paths lead to poor faith, so also various paths lead away from it. These include:

- a weakening of, or a break in, communication with God, together with a drying up or withering of the inner life;

- a move away into atheism, a loss of faith;

- joining one of the non-traditional religious cults which claim to possess a 'non-confessional' nature;

- mono-confessionalism, that is, returning to a former confession or attaching to a new one;

- multi-confessionalism, that is, the experience of belonging to two or several confessions;

- a synthesis of various confessions and the construction of a universal religion.

86. Thus, poor faith can be a primary, naive impulse of faith, but it can also absorb a multi-faceted spiritual experience. It is able to assimilate the values of various mysteries and rites, but it remains the person's inner work, a communication of the unique individual with the One, which takes place completely outside the framework of any religious cult. However well-endowed poor faith might be, it remains poor to the extent that it is not identical to any confession at all, and it does not permit confessions to take a hold and to form within itself.

Poor Messianism

87. Poor faith remains poor precisely because it is not organised. As soon as anyone begins to form something like a 'community of adherents to poor faith' with its own customs and core teaching, it is no longer poor faith, but yet another Church, albeit a radically protestant and non-conformist one.

88. 'Poor faith' does *not* exclude communication among believers. In the New Testament it is said: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord, there the Lord is also." This is always communication that operates horizontally, without hierarchs or people taking charge.

89. Karl Jaspers wrote: "In our days the person who wants to live in an unenclosed, non-organised community of authentic people... , this person lives as a single person, connected with other single persons ... in a union which survives any catastrophe, in a relationship of trust, which is not fixed or sealed in agreements, nor guaranteed by the fulfillment of any specific requirements." It is possible to call poor faith a 'universal invisible church'—it neither gains, nor loses, by being called such.

90. At some particular time in ancient Israel monotheism was established, which then gave the impetus for the formation of other forms of monotheism, namely Christianity and Islam. These religions each recognise one God, but they enter into jealous conflict with one another, which manifests dogmatically, ethnically, politically and militarily.

Is it possible to love God without relating jealously towards those who love Him in a different way? All these religions are like spokes of a wheel going towards one and the same centre. And the closer they come to that centre, the closer they come to one another.

91. The beginnings of all religious traditions are various, but the end can only be a commonly shared end. Monotheism turns into *theomonism*, a coming together of all forms of monotheism in the unity of faith itself. The historical significance of the post-secular age may lie precisely in this transition.

92. The messianism that is an inherent feature of all faith systems in the Abrahamic tradition is the expectation of a Messiah and a constant state of readiness for His coming. "Take heart, for you do not know the hour, nor indeed the day, when the Son of Man shall come" (Matt. 25; 13). Poor messianism, or 'messianicity' (a term coined by Jacques Derrida) is a broader *not-knowing*: of the very possibility of the coming of the Messiah.

93. Such messianicity, as a projection of poor faith into the absolute future, does not guarantee the appearance of a real Messiah. Rather, it consciously attributes to any 'claimant' the possibility of personifying false messiahship, and remains a vanishing horizon for our looking and striving.

94. At the same time, the open structure of expectation is preserved, akin to the structure of hospitality, of 'inviting-in.' Absolute hospitality does not know in advance who the guest is who will appear on one's threshold. The same holds true for poor messianism: it is elevated into the absolute and at the same time reduced to a minimum. It is an expectation that is open to any unexpected happenings or events, including the *non*-appearance of the Messiah. It is faith in its initial source, a precondition for any other faith, a pre-faith for all faiths.

95. That same Godot whom the other characters in Beckett's play of the absurd are waiting for, does not arrive either. It is he who is the true God (God O!), as he is defined in the relationship between the maximum and minimum of faith. This is the general condition for all other forms of expectation: the expectation of good, of justice, of perfection. This 'supra-expectation' is transforming the world by the power of its openness, although it does not promise fulfillment, but only allows of such a possibility.

Translated by Jonathan Sutton

