

**Secularization of/or Mysticism:  
Notes on Richard H. Jones' Philosophy of Mysticism**

Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki  
University of Szeged  
([szugyiczki.zsuzsanna@gmail.com](mailto:szugyiczki.zsuzsanna@gmail.com))

Since about the 1960s 'secularization'<sup>1</sup> has undoubtedly been one of the most influential and debated theories of religion in society. Though it might not be the most current term for characterizing contemporary religious phenomena and changes in society, 'secularization,' and the concomitant idea that religion is in decline in modern societies, is still a persistent trope in some areas of academia. Some fields of science - those that are not primarily concerned with religion - have not yet adapted to the general understanding that the theory of secularization is wanting.<sup>2</sup> Outside of academia, the idea of secularization is wide-spread and often used to describe the decline of religiosity in today's society.

One of the most recent monographs on mysticism entitled *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable* was written by Richard H. Jones, and published in 2016. In this work, Jones aims at providing a comprehensive account of several important questions related to mysticism raised by scientific research and from the perspective of postmodernity. In the epilogue (entitled "The Demise of Mysticism Today"), Jones summarizes the key findings of the book and glances out to the present and future states of mysticism. His purpose is to explain the change in religious experiences, in particular with regard to those that appear in connection with mysticism in modernity, linking the latter with the idea of secularization. The idea of secularization of mystical experiences is also briefly introduced. In my perception the secularization of mystical experiences is drawn up more as an impression rather than a well-thought-through argument supported by relevant research and data. Nevertheless, I consider it an interesting and highly debatable concept, which is worthy of further discussion. Firstly, I will briefly introduce the relevance and the structure of Jones' book, as well as the concept and categories of mysticism the author writes about, as there few available reviews of it. Secondly, for a more precise understanding I will be analyzing the content of the epilogue, along with five aspects of it: secularization, modernity, the concept of classical mysticism, today's mystical phenomena and the future of mysticism. Thirdly, I will be using these aspects to clarify the idea of the secularization of mystical experiences. Lastly, I will put this concept

---

<sup>1</sup> Wilson (1966); Berger (1967); and (critically) Luckmann (1967).

<sup>2</sup> It is widely accepted in academia that the original thesis is not working either theoretically or practically. Despite this fact, it might still be important for works focusing on religious phenomena in modern societies to touch upon this theory, primary because of the above-mentioned influence it had in and outside of academia (Máté-Tóth, 2014, p. 37).

under a more thorough critical scrutiny, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of mysticism as a contemporary phenomenon.

Richard H. Jones<sup>3</sup> considers his book to be an important addendum to Walter Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy* (1960). His purpose is to address the scientific developments and questions that have emerged with postmodernism since Stace's book was published.<sup>4</sup> He deals with a wide range of topics in a "sensible and balanced" way.<sup>5</sup> Reviewers point out that the book gives much space to examples taken from Theravada Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta and Hinduism,<sup>6</sup> but lacks a similarly thorough understanding and examples of Sufism, Christian, and especially Jewish mysticism.<sup>7</sup> Miller (2017) points out certain examples where Jones cites different authorities with identical views without detailed explanation, creating the impression of "parallelomania."<sup>8</sup> Beside these downfalls, *Philosophy of Mysticism* does provide a comprehensive guide to understanding questions and problems related to mysticism, such as the categorization and the scientific study of mystical experiences; whether or not mystics' claims about their experiences are cognitive and how the purported insight they provide into ultimate reality should be dealt with. He also observes different aspects of mysticism from the perspective of philosophy, such as metaphysics, language, rationality, morality and the compatibility of science and mysticism.

Jones' concept of mysticism aims to highlight neglected aspects of the phenomenon, notably, the path of preparation and the transformation of lifestyle following the mystical experience.<sup>9</sup> Jones argues, along with William James, that the philosophical discussion and definitions of mysticism had been reduced to the mystical experience itself and neglected the above mentioned aspects.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, in *Philosophy of Mysticism* Jones describes mysticism as follows:

---

<sup>3</sup> The author has a Ph.D. from Columbia University and a J.D. from University of California at Berkeley. He has written books on the scientific study of religious experiences (in particular about mystical experiences), on Theravada Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph W. Hood, Jr. considers Jones' book not only a good review on the literature of the scientific study of mysticism but a critical extension of Stace's work with a "sophisticated discussion of the extent, range, and metaphysical implications of mysticism" (Hood's review quoted on Jones' webpage: URL: <http://www.richardjonesbooks.com/index.html>).

<sup>5</sup> Jerome Gellman described Jones' approach this way and denotes that Jones avoids the usual problem of philosophical texts about mysticism, i.e. arguing pro or contra mysticism in a clearly biased way. URL: <http://readingreligion.org/books/philosophy-mysticism>.

<sup>6</sup> Miller (2017) URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49662>

<sup>7</sup> Gellman (2016) URL: <http://readingreligion.org/books/philosophy-mysticism> and Miller (2017) URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49662>.

<sup>8</sup> Miller (2017). URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49662>.

<sup>9</sup> In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Gellman Jerome defines mysticism in a similar way: focusing on the transformational aspect of it rather than the *unio mystica*. "Mysticism' is best thought of as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined. In contrast with most of the definitions human transformation is defined here as the goal of mysticism instead of unity with ultimate reality/transcendent. A large emphasis is put on the apparatus supporting the mystic and setting up the mystical tradition." URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mysticism/>

<sup>10</sup> „The modern reduction of mysticism to merely a matter of personal experiences was solidified by William James in 1902 (1958). Nevertheless, mysticism is traditionally more encompassing than simply isolated mystical experiences: it is about living one's whole life aligned with reality as it truly is (as defined by a tradition's beliefs)" (Jones, 2016, p. 2).

[...] in this book “mystical” will refer only to phenomena centered around an inward quest focused on two specific classes of experiences. [...] It is a “way” (yana, dao) in the sense of both a path and a resulting way of life. [...] Nevertheless, mysticism is traditionally more encompassing than simply isolated mystical experiences: it is about living one’s whole life aligned with reality as it truly is (as defined by a tradition’s beliefs) (Jones, 2016, p. 2).

Jones acknowledges that what distinguishes mysticism from metaphysics and other forms of religiosity is a special form of experience. His typology of mystical experiences has a significant role in his argument about why mysticism should be taken seriously by scientists and philosophers, and it also relates to the cognitive claims of mystics. He uses and further develops the distinction between “extrovertive” and “introvertive” mystical experiences distinguished by Otto (1932), later adopted, named and developed by Stace (1960). Jones introduces further subcategories<sup>11</sup> and focuses on the so called “empty-depth mystical experiences.”<sup>12</sup> Contrary to Stace (1960), Jones does not make a difference in value between introvertive and extrovertive mystical experiences, that is to say, he does not devalue extrovertive ones.

The epilogue of *Philosophy of Mysticism* (2016) is entitled “The Demise of Mysticism Today.” In this chapter, Jones first summarizes eleven key points defended in the book and proceeds to discuss the relevance of studying mysticism today. According to Jones, mystics purportedly experience aspects of reality that non-mystics do not; studying mystical experiences, especially empty-depth mystical experiences, can affect our views of the nature of consciousness and the study of mind. Hence, for philosophers and theologians, the experiential aspect of mystical experiences is important to consider. Besides, Jones underlines the importance of what he calls “mystical selflessness”, as it exposes the underlying values and beliefs of different cultures.

The next part of the epilogue is titled: *The Antimystical Climate Today*. Here, Jones discusses certain factors in culture which work against taking mysticism seriously. He starts with academia, firstly with naturalists who deny the cognitive claims of mysticism along with the possibility and the explanation of transcendent realities – since these cannot be proved scientifically. Furthermore, he mentions postmodernists who argue

---

<sup>11</sup> Both of the categories have an inner dimension to them and involve an insight into the ultimate reality - however differently it is perceived by different traditions and mystics. The main differences between the categories are that extrovertive ones are “this-worldly,” involve differentiated content, are dualistic and include sensory inputs with a passive receptivity to those; on the other hand, during introvertive experiences sensory content is retained from the mind; and the consciousness is void of all sense-experiences. Among extrovertive experiences Jones arguably tackles three subcategories: nature mysticism, cosmic consciousness and mindfulness state of consciousness. Introvertive mystical experiences are divided into two subcategories: those with differentiated content might be theistic or non-theistic; introvertive experiences with non-differentiated content are called empty-depth mystical experiences (Jones 2016, pp. 1-36.)

<sup>12</sup> There is a striking resemblance here to what Robert Forman describes as pure consciousness event (Forman, 1990, pp. 8., 22-24.): a wakeful, contentless, nonintentional form of introvertive mysticism, not shaped, constructed or formed by epistemological processes, which are responsible for ordinary sense experiences. Jones quotes Forman stating that it might simply be a pure state of consciousness (described by Forman) and highlights that as it is not a full emptiness, nor a state of unconsciousness, empty-depth mystical experiences are opened for mystics’ interpretation after the experience. (Jones, 2016, p.22)

against genuine mystical experiences. According to Jones (2016), in the field of Philosophy the topic of mysticism is faded into the background. With regards to Religious Studies, mystical experiences are not considered significant anymore due to the popularity of constructivism and the attribution theory. Similarly, to naturalists' point of view, those who accept mystical experiences deny that they are cognitive. At the end, the scientific study of mystical experiences is pushed to neuroscience.

Aspects in Christian theology are also mentioned, explaining that the direct experience of God is impossible for postmodern theologians on logical grounds and an "experientialist" approach, which would take mystical experiences as genuine ones, is considered outdated according to Jones. Following that, he talks about what happens outside of academia, mentioning the West where there is a general decline in serious mysticism. He lists certain aspects of religion, psychology and culture in general which create an 'antimystical' climate and, according to Jones, this results in a trend he calls the *secularization of mystical experiences*.<sup>13</sup> This trend purportedly started with the separation of the mystical experience from mysticism<sup>14,15</sup> Jones perceives this as a twofold process: absorbing mystical experiences into modern culture and abandoning a fully transformed lifestyle based on the mystical experience. This proceeding eventually resulted in naturalistic spirituality replacing "classical mysticism" (Jones, 2016, p. 337).

In *Accepting Mysticism Today*, Jones proposes the question of whether religions will be able to survive without generating experiences of transcendent realities. He starts contemplating about this problem by outlining the changes mysticism faces in today's society, i.e. the natural realm cannot be ignored by mystics anymore, as we no longer live in a sacred universe in modernity. This poses some questions regarding the possibility of mystical experiences as well as a quest for mystics to change the way they interpret

---

<sup>13</sup> The phrase and to some extent, the idea behind it seems to be Jones' innovation. Though, in the beginning of the 20th century Theodore Schroeder (1921) published an article titled 'Secularized mystics,' in which Schroeder differentiated religious mystics and their counterparts: secular mystics. It was an attempt to highlight the purported psychological reasons behind wars and the emergence of omnipotent leaders. He uses the words secular and anti-mystical as synonyms, with a positive overtone – as mysticism and mystical experiences are related to an early, immature stage of human intellectual and psychological development.

Walter Stace talks about a secular or non-theological mysticism of Plotinus (Stace, 1960, pp. 105-112). "And first we take Plotinus as representing the classical pagan world. Plotinus was not an adherent of any organized religious system but a believer in the metaphysics of Plato, which he sought to develop and advance" (Stace, 1960, p. 105). In this sense whether mysticism is secular is decided upon the religious affiliation or non-affiliation of the mystic. The idea behind it relies on constructivism: the interpretation of the experience and purportedly the experience itself is essentially influenced by the religious, personal, historical context of the mystic. Later, in this paper, I am dealing with more complex scientific reflections on the topic: the link between mysticism and secularization, related to the texts of Ernst Troeltsch and William James.

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above, Jones argues that mysticism is more than mystical experiences. Mystical experiences are key parts of mysticism, but we should not forget about mystical traditions along with their teachings, techniques, metaphysics etc. and the transformation of lifestyle (Jones, 2016, p. 2). Based on this concept, later in this paper I am arguing that the term secularization of mysticism would be a more suitable expression for Jones' concept.

<sup>15</sup> "The history of psychology and religion since the 1890s has been one where religious 'experience' has become an individual event and where the boundaries of the self have been reinforced. Building on Protestant notions of the self in relation to God – and thus continuing longer historical processes of individualization from the Reformation – the early psychologists of religion located the significance of religion within individual experience. [...] mysticism could be reconfigured as the pursuit of 'altered states of consciousness' and religious practices became represented as manifestations of inner psychical processes rather than as social forms of expression" (Carrette and King, 2005, p. 68).

introvertive experiences and act in the world.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, Jones talks about a possible *Mystical Revolution* which would change the situation of religion and could also have an effect on science. He ends the epilogue with a part titled *A Thirst for Transcendence* writing about why mysticism could be beneficial for today's society: it would lead people to a more meaningful and morally thoughtful and compassionate life.

Overall, in my viewpoint the epilogue significantly stands out from the book because it has a more personal tone and less scientific purpose. It resembles a set of impressions and feelings; and introduces a very powerful vision of mysticism without a clear concept – which, retrospectively, seems to be the underlying drive of the main text. Almost all the chosen researchers and authors quoted in the epilogue have the purpose of driving the text forward to the point without really challenging the concept. As opposed to the “sensible and balanced”<sup>17</sup> main chapters, the epilogue seems mostly vague and one-sided.

In my opinion, nevertheless this text raises important questions explicitly and implicitly, related to modernity, secularization and mysticism. In the next part of my paper I will be dealing with the questions he explicitly raises: the decline of mysticism, the future of mysticism, and experiences which challenge the borders of already existing categories and definitions of mysticism. Therefore, I aim to understand and clarify the thoughts that Jones articulated. In order to do that I will analyze five of the text's central concepts: *secularization, modernity, “classical” mystical experiences, today's mystical experiences, and the future of mysticism.*

## Secularization

It will be worth concentrating first on secularization, both as a phrase and a theory, as Jones is not concise about the use of the word, does not define his understanding of it in the epilogue, and does not deal with the theory in the main text. I categorized his concepts and phrases related to secularization implicitly or explicitly based on the levels of analysis suggested by Karel Dobbelaere (1999) and José Casanova (2006). Each of them aims to get a good grasp of the paradigm - Dobbelaere by highlighting the process of it by categorizing the theories, and Casanova by clarifying the different uses of the word. Dobbelaere distinguishes the macro (societal), meso (subsystem/organizational) and micro (individual) levels to help our understanding, but emphasizes that these levels are interconnected and influence one another. Observing the different levels, Dobbelaere found that societal secularization is related to modernity and the political process of promoting laicization: institutional differentiation or segmentation, autonomization, rationalization, societalization, disenchantment of the world, privatization and

---

<sup>16</sup> “That is, the problem for anything resembling a classical mystical way of life today is how to reinject the world into a nonnaturalistic framework with transcendent realities without denying the world's full reality—one that incorporates both an eternal ontic vertical dimension and a historical horizontal dimension as both real and important. But if successful, mysticism can replace the image of a totally transcendent deity with one that is also immanent in space and time, since the god of theistic mysticism is experienceable and the ground of the natural world” (Jones, 2016, p. 340).

<sup>17</sup> See footnote no. 6.

generalization. On the subsystem level it occurs as: pluralization, relativization and this-worldliness. On the individual level it appears as a decline of the commitment to the institutional level of religiosity, individualization, unbelief and bricolage. (Dobbelaere, 1999, p. 2.) Casanova (2006) aims to refocus the fruitless debate around secularization and to provide the base for a comparative historical analysis across societies along three patterns: the decline of religious beliefs and practices, the privatization of religion, and the differentiation of the secular sphere. Moreover, he suggests that sociologists of religion should focus on analyzing newly emerging forms of religious phenomena in world religions on the societal, group and individual level, instead of obsessing over the decline of religion. (Casanova, 2006, p. 17).

Related to the *societal level*, firstly, Jones talks about a *loss of faith in transcendence* and the lack of all-encompassing myth (Jones, 2016, pp. 335-336). He says that people lost sight of the ontic source of the world and mysticism takes this further. Mysticism, which could provide claims and direct experiences, has lost its focus on the transcendent and has been replaced by a naturalistic spirituality solely focusing on the phenomenal realm. Though, it still is able to align mystics with reality as it truly is, in the sense that it helps them with a greater sense of well-being and better functioning in society (Jones, 2016, p. 337).

*Secondly*, he describes today's *culture and society as an antimystical climate*. (Jones, 2016, pp. 333-337). On the one hand, it is secularized to the extent that we are probably unable to experience the world the way that pre-modern people did.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, society hinders mystical experiences: self-will dominates our culture and psychology works for this as well by strengthening the ego; self-assertiveness is in focus in people's life and it makes mystical selflessness seem counterproductive and introverted mystical experiences as life goals seem irrational. Moreover, and to some extent refuting what he had described earlier, Jones highlights an important aspect from today's society which results in an increasing interest in mysticism: people feel lost and are searching for certainty, reassurance and connection with other people.

*Thirdly*, Jones talks about a trend of *cultivating mystical experiences absorbed into parts of modern culture*. People use these mystical experiences and traditional techniques to benefit from them psychologically and physiologically. Some aspects or a "watered-down" version of traditional teachings might be adopted temporarily, and they do not engage in a full mystical way of life, following the experience. He mentions mindfulness meditation as an example.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> By the word *secularized* he means that modern scientific findings about the natural realm have a huge impact not only on the way we perceive the transcendent but the way we think about mysticism as well. Here he makes a difference between a "premodern" and a modern, secular worldview, which I am discussing later, at his concept of modernity.

<sup>19</sup> Mindfulness meditation seems to have a distinguished place for Jones as it is highlighted not only here, but in the main chapters as well: it is one of the three subcategories of extroverted mystical experiences. Nature mysticism and cosmic consciousness seem to cover the range of focus for extroverted experiences. What seems to be an added level in mindfulness meditation is that it is free of conceptualizations. "But one state of consciousness may be free of all conceptualizations: a "pure" mindfulness involving sensory differentiations but not any conceptualizations" (Jones, 2016, p. 13).

Jones' idea of secularization related to the *group level* can be discussed in two parts. *Firstly*, he talks about a trend of *mysticism decreasing* in some of the *major religions*. Major religions seem to hinder mysticism.<sup>20</sup> People are not involved in traditional practices anymore, at least not for an extended period of time. Tradition seems to be neglected in several forms: teachers of metaphysical doctrines are not needed, people do not want to adhere to “difficult monastic ethical codes”, transcendence is not in the focus of mysticism anymore and scientific researchers support this by focusing on the effect of mysticism solely on the body. He mentions New Age theorizing which is also disconnected from mystical experiences. *Secondly*, he contemplates the *future of religion*. Jones links the vitality and success of religion – and in his perception the lack of it in today's society – to religious experiences and especially to mysticism.<sup>21</sup> He argues that the survival – a re-awakening – of religion could depend on mysticism, which provides empirical facts of what religion talks about. That said, mysticism needs to adapt to the changes that have taken place in society, as well as science's advancement over the past century (Jones, 2016, pp. 343-346.) I will discuss the concept of reawakening through mysticism in more detail when exploring the secularization of mysticism.

Regarding secularization on the *individual level*,<sup>22</sup> two directions can be pointed out in Jones' text: primarily, the seemingly contrary trend of *simultaneous decrease and increase in mysticism* and, secondly, the change of mysticism. As for the first direction, Jones points out that engaging in traditional practices and adopting a full mystical way of life for the long term, is in decline.<sup>23</sup> For the above mentioned societal reasons he thinks that it is difficult to see introverted mystical experiences as the ultimate goals of life and solely focus on them; and few people want to give up their sense of individual existence – which is a fundamental element of mysticism. Somewhat contrary to the aforementioned aspects, he points out that “Today there may be a spike in interest in mysticism as people search for a sense of certainty and reassurance of the rightness of things in a time of uncertainty and search for a way to feel experientially grounded in the world and connected to other people...” (Jones, 2016, p. 336.) He considers this to be superficial, however, as these people are not likely to engage in long established spiritual traditions, with their developed depth. Moreover, many young people describe

---

<sup>20</sup> Jones talks about the decline of Sufism, the limitedness of mystical traditions in Judaism because of the fear of antinomianism. The authoritarian nature of monastic training poorly influences the way Buddhist monks commit to meditation/spirituality. In Christianity he considers the split between spirituality and theology in the early modern period the reason for the decrease of interest in mysticism. For him, rigid conformity to rules seems to be the reason why there is less emphasis on meditation in Eastern and Western monasteries. Liberal churches discourage mystical experiences and mysticism as unnecessary. In conservative churches my mystical knowledge of God is seen as blasphemous and other religious experiences related to personal salvation are emphasized (Jones, 2016, pp. 334-335).

<sup>21</sup> I am discussing this topic, later when analyzing Jones' concept of the future of mysticism.

<sup>22</sup> Ernst Troeltsch (1921) considers mysticism a religious dimension -related to the level of the individual, besides church (level of society) and sect (level of group) and highlights aspects relevant to the topic of this paper. Mysticism is described as: radical individualism; neutrality or adversity towards religious institutions and history; it considers the dogmatic dimension of religion relative on an experiential basis. Morally it is not affiliated with a specific religious tradition; actions and decisions are based on emotional and spiritual impressions and kindlings.

<sup>23</sup> In Jones' argumentation this trend of decreasing in mysticism is closely connected to hindrance of it by religion and society which I was discussing above at the group and societal level.

themselves as seekers<sup>24</sup> and mystical experiences remain common in contemporary society.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning the *second aspect*: the way people practice mysticism has changed. People might adopt certain aspects of a mystical way of life without knowing or committing to traditional mystical ethical codes, difficult monastic ethical codes and mystical teachings. Instead of a total inner transformation (which Jones considers to be a vital aspect of mysticism), the focus is more on the psychological and physiological well-being of the individual, which these experiences might contribute to. Most of the people who practice these techniques aim to calm the mind or to focus on the present, increase their happiness, overcome problems in their lives and function better in society (Jones, 2016, p. 337).

Jones' thoughts can be related to Casanova's first category: *decline of religious beliefs and practices*, and can be summarized in a twofold way. On the one hand: "[...] serious mysticism is in a general decline in the West" (Jones, 2016, p. 334). The interest in mysticism - as we know it from previous centuries, with its commitment, depth, fully transformed mystical way of life, focus on the transcendent, selflessness, following of traditional techniques etc. seems to be in decline.

On the other hand, there is an increased interest in New Age spirituality - particularly as people search for new ways to improve their emotional and mental well-being (Jones, 2016, p. 336). Jones mentions religious seekers and "nones"<sup>26</sup> in relation to this topic. Some of Jones' ideas confirm and others refute the concept of the *privatization of religion*.<sup>27</sup> Confirming the concept is a phenomenon that Jones disparagingly calls watered-down spirituality.<sup>28</sup> It is about people who pick and choose when it comes to practicing religion: they might attain mystical experiences and practice traditional techniques for a certain purpose without immersing themselves in the teachings of the tradition. On the other hand, one of the key points of the secularization of mystical experiences seem to refute the concept, specifically the trend of practicing some forms of mystical experiences absorbed into parts of modern culture.<sup>29</sup>

In Jones' text *the differentiation of the secular sphere* appears not as a political process, but as the *absence from or loss of the transcendent dimension* in modern culture. Firstly, Jones links the loss of a transcendent dimension, and the particular focus

---

<sup>24</sup> He describes seekers as people who do not necessarily identify with the institutional level of a specific religion, do not adhere to a specific religious authority, tend to be experimental when it comes to personal religious experiences (Jones, 2016, p. 336).

<sup>25</sup> Jones, 2016, p. 336.

<sup>26</sup> *Nones* refers to a religiously unaffiliated group of society (also referred to as non-believers) in the United States (Jones, 2016, p. 345).

<sup>27</sup> Luckmann argued against the original thesis of secularization with the concept of the privatization of religion, stating that besides the fact that people are losing connection with the institutional dimension of religion - religion is still an important factor in society (Luckmann, 1967).

<sup>28</sup> "The superficial spirituality of the New Age is more about validating how one currently leads one's life than about any serious change in a mystical direction—a watered-down spirituality of a "Buddhism Lite," as it were" (Jones, 2016, p. 336).

<sup>29</sup> "Cultivating mystical experiences—in particular, mindfulness meditation—has been absorbed into parts of modern culture while engaging in full mystical ways of life has atrophied" (Jones, 2016, p. 336).



on the immanent, closely to modernity. He says that only the phenomenal world is deemed real and scientific research on mysticism strengthens this approach by focusing only on the bodily aspects of mystical experience. Moreover, the loss of the pre-modern mindset, as well as the embeddedness of scientific discoveries in our education and culture, has resulted in a “secularized mindset” that might prevent us from experiencing the transcendent – and at least from taking it seriously.<sup>30</sup> Mysticism today is absorbed into modern culture and cultivated by many, and it appears as though the experiences are separated from the religious goals and the traditional mystical way of life. Secondly, Jones suggests a *change in mysticism*: it must be this-worldly – thus it needs to provide a meaningful interpretation of this world and its problems as these, unlike in the past, cannot be neglected anymore. Moreover, mystics must incorporate two worlds – bringing back the transcendent and connecting it with the phenomenal realm – with a meaningful explanation and activity in the world. The author even takes this suggestion a step further, implying that civilization depends on mystics and a religious reawakening induced by today’s people (the spiritual heirs of religion), and argues that this could help in regaining the lost, transcendental dimension (Jones, 2016, p. 345). He also considers whether humanity can be called *homo religious* and if a mystical society is possible in the near future (Jones, 2016, pp. 343-346).

To summarize this wide range of ideas about secularization, Jones mentions these trends, research findings and visions in order to support his argument about the secularization of mystical experiences. He identifies two simultaneously occurring processes: the decline of mysticism, on the one hand, where mysticism is understood as an immersive, time-consuming and deep engagement related to traditional teachings, techniques, based on an experience which provides insight to the ultimate reality and resulting in a fully transformed lifestyle. The other process is the increase of interest in mysticism, where mysticism is understood as one of the tools for aiding people’s quest in a happier, more fulfilled and productive life in society; providing certainty and connection with people. This type of mysticism is temporary and focuses on the experience, rather than the two other aspects mentioned above. Stepping back and looking at it from a sociological perspective, these trends do not seem to obviously support what Jones means by secularization, i.e. the decline of religious (particularly mystical) beliefs and practices in modernity. Mysticism and individual religiosity are said to expand on the expense of the group level. The privatization of religion: “[...] has removed the social dimension of religion and created a spirituality of the self – of the consuming self.” (Carrette and King, 2005, p. 68.) Some argue against this notion, stating that instead of a loss of religiosity on the group level, we can talk about the construction of voluntary associations and new types of religious communities. (Casanova, 2006, 18.) In the following part, I am summarizing Jones’ understanding of modernity to be able to reflect on the strong connection he draws between secularization and modernity.

---

<sup>30</sup> "On the contrary, the United States has always been the paradigmatic form of a modern secular, differentiated society. Yet the triumph of “the secular” came aided by religion rather than at its expense, and the boundaries themselves became so diffused that, at least by European ecclesiastical standards, it is not clear where the secular ends and religion begins” (Casanova, 2006, p. 12).

## **Modernity**

Jones makes a distinction between premodernity and modernity and suggests a straightforward process of losing the transcendental aspect of the world during the latter, with time progressing. He links the idea of a sacred universe, belief in a comprehensive myth and the embeddedness of the transcendental realm in the immanent to premodernity. Opposed to that the modern society either completely forgot about the transcendent or even if people have experiences of it, it is hard to take the content of mystical experiences seriously (Jones, 2016, pp. 338-339). “For many today the only ontic claim that mystical experiences can support is that only the natural mind and body is involved, not a transcendent mind or other reality” (Jones, 2016, p. 337).

Moreover, Jones suggests that – we are in a civilizational crisis: visible in spiritual decline and malaise - detachment from religious tradition is emphasized (Jones, 2016, pp. 343-345). Based on Paul Tillich’s thoughts, Jones thinks that a religious reawakening and the regaining of the lost sacred dimension is needed, but seems impossible in the near future (Jones, 2016, pp. 345-346). It is interesting to note that loss of interest in mysticism is more because of this aspect of our culture than of science – according to Jones: mysticism is seen as counterproductive to our society and self-assertion. He describes our current period as a time of uncertainty, an age of distraction, and characterises culture as materialistic, affluent and too comfortable, promoting self-assertion.

Before I turn to presenting Jones’ understanding of mysticism, I would like to highlight some aspects to consider in relation to modernity and secularization: in particular the relationship between the premodern and the modern, the dichotomy of traditional and modern, the close link between modernity and secularization and the exclusivity of the immanent.

The first of these is the relationship between premodern (traditional) and modern, both as an adjective and as an era. Almost all of the aspects of modernity, that Jones deems as negative and hindering from the perspective of religion, are essential in the definition of modernity. Jones talks about modernity in opposition to the pre-modern era. Similarly, Troeltsch (1912) thinks that every era can be understood in relation to the previous one and, especially when it is over, from the perspective of the era which follows

it. He makes a distinction between modernity and the so-called church civilization<sup>31</sup> – the preceding era. The success of modernity as a new era comes from autonomously forming cultural notions which have an immanent and direct effect. If there is any authority at all – it is based on rationality and autonomy. The emphasis is on personal beliefs. Modernity is described using the following terms: individualism, immanent focus of life, constant reflection on life – as opposed to an intuitive form of it; belief in progress; religion loses its strong basis. Both authors make use of the opposition, but in different ways. For Troeltsch there is no value difference, or superiority, between the eras - their difference is essential not only for defining them, but also for the existence of modernity itself. For Jones, however, the loss of (contact with) tradition and focus on the transcendent, along with the other characteristics of today's society, results in a civilizational crisis, and a sense of spiritual malaise for many.

I think this is a highly problematic point of view based on a rigid dichotomy between the traditional and the modern; and linking secularization and modernization closely together. Casanova (2006) adapts a more fluid view of this problem, stating that the global expansion of modernity challenges world religions to radically change. This process is not exclusive to modernity - the European colonial expansion had a similar effect, but "*Under conditions of globalization, world religions do not only draw upon their own traditions but also increasingly upon one another. Inter-civilizational encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings, diasporic diffusions, hybridity, creolization, and transcultural hyphenations are all part and parcel of the global present*" (Casanova, 2006, p. 17).

In its original formulation, secularization was closely linked to modernity. Religion loses its plausibility and its status as the provider of an all-encompassing explanation of the world. Along with that, the world also loses religious legitimation (Máté-Tóth, 2014, p. 38). However, Casanova points out that "It is the postulated intrinsic correlation between modernization and secularization that is highly problematic" (Casanova, 2006, p. 13). Casanova suggests that there are modern and secular societies, which are deeply religious, and premodern societies that are secular and irreligious from a Euro-centric religious perspective (Casanova, 2006, p. 13). Moreover, the scope of the theory has been questioned by many. It may, for example, be a suitable theory to explain the decrease in religious institutional affiliation in Western Europe over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but its global use would require extensive research. Furthermore, it cannot be applied unconditionally to the West (North America and Europe), as Jones suggests it can.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Church civilization is described as an all-encompassing point of understanding, a totality which is covered and intertwined with every aspect of life. It is described as a belief in an absolute and direct divine revelation; and in the institute of church – the organizational form of revelation. It is an authority-based culture and has an ascetic view of life – concentrating on the after-world. Eisenstadt shares a similar view, highlighting the essentiality of wide-spread cultural acceptance of traditions and the threefold limitations of traditional society which results in the impracticality of structural limitations: "The essence of traditionality is in the cultural acceptance of these cultural definitions of tradition as a basic criterion of social activity, as the basic referent of collective identity, and as defining the societal and cultural orders and the degrees of variability among them. [...] The distinctiveness of the center in traditional societies is manifest in a threefold symbolic and institutional limitation: the content of these centers is limited by reference to some past event; access to positions as legitimate interpreters of the scope of the traditions is limited; and the right of broader groups to participate in the centers is limited" (Eisenstadt, 2003, pp. 138-139).

<sup>32</sup> "Outside of academia, serious mysticism is in general decline in the West" (Jones, 2016, p. 334).

When it comes to the United States, for example, sociologists tend to discard the theory as the indicators do not show a long-term decline of religiosity (Casanova, 2006, p. 8). Máté-Tóth aims to define the distinguishing character of the Central-Eastern European region and tackles the question of whether the theory of secularization is applicable to this context (Máté-Tóth, 2014). Overall, Casanova considers the strong linking of secularization to modernity to be the root of the impasse in the debate. Instead of this, he suggests focusing on the fusion and dissolution of religious political and societal communities - churches, states and nations (Casanova, 2006, p. 15).

Jones primarily understands modernity as an era during which people lost sight of the ontic realm. The transcendental dimension is no longer in the focus of scientific research on mysticism, not to mention the mystics who have also lost interest in anything transcendental, searching only for the immanent aspects and material changes, such as health benefits, that the experiences may provide. Dealing with similar questions, Charles Taylor provides the concept of "the immanent frame" (Taylor, 2007, pp. 539-593). The immanent frame is a set of self-sufficient, impersonal and immanent orders in modernity, covering cosmic, social and moral grounds. It emerges in opposition to a transcendent one, but it does not necessarily "slough off" the transcendent. "Some of us want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it" (Taylor, 2007, pp. 543-544).

### **Classical mysticism**

In the epilogue, Jones describes a form of mysticism in opposition to today's mystical phenomena. It is a pure, undamaged, whole version of mysticism – without removing mystical experiences from the equation. It essentially involves a mystical way of life, a focus on the transcendent,<sup>33</sup> and takes the cognitive claims of mysticism seriously. What makes it different from today's mystical phenomena is the long-term commitment, engagement with traditional teachings, adherence to difficult monastic ethical codes, and so on. The phrases used to label this phenomenon include: classical mysticism, classical mystical way of life, serious mysticism, serious change in a mystical direction, commitment to a rigorous traditional spirituality with its developed depth, full mystical way of life (as opposed to mystical experiences only), and traditional mysticism. The people involved in this type of mysticism are referred to as classical mystics. As Jones uses the term classical mysticism most frequently, I am going to refer to this phenomenon according to that label.

Classical mysticism seems alien in today's society with its emphasis on passivity, ascetic renunciation, forgetting about the body, neglecting the natural world, selflessness which goes against the culture of self-assertion. Because of this, classical mystics appear

---

<sup>33</sup> Once again, I am referring to Jones' understanding of premodern mindset as a precondition for mystical experiences. See: Footnote 15. and Modernity.

as irrational, passive and immoral. Even though today's mysticism seems to be flourishing, this other form of serious mysticism is dying.<sup>34</sup>

Jones uses *insight into the vertical dimension of life and the mystics commitment* to a full transformation to provide the basis for a defense of the transcendent ground to this world. According to Jones, these cognitive claims of the transcendent might make others feel uncomfortable in a society where people have more broadly lost sight of the transcendent.

As I mentioned above, Jones describes the purportedly decreasing version of mysticism ("classical" mysticism) with several phrases/adjectives, now I would like to take a moment to look at what these words imply.<sup>35</sup> The word *classical* suggests that this type of mysticism is traditional in form, based on methods developed over a long period of time; and it is considered to have a long lasting value. *Tradition* and *traditional* also suggests an extended period of time, of development and usage of beliefs, principles and actions. The developed depth that Jones associates with classical mysticism primarily refers to organization on the group level, which provides the individual with a set of traditional teachings, techniques, and rules to follow. This depth and complexity require commitment for an extended period in order to understand it and use it correctly. Classical mysticism also means a change in a mystical direction following the mystical experience. Mysticism does not end with the experience, but, as Jones suggests, the main part is the commencement of a full mystical way of life afterwards. Moreover, traditional spirituality<sup>36</sup> is said to be rigorous (careful, thought-through and controlling), and serious (which implies long-term dedication, commitment and a meaningful practice). As today's mysticism is presented in contrast to classical mysticism, this effort might highlight further levels of depth regarding both phenomena.

### Mysticism today

Today's mysticism is defined in opposition to classical mysticism: as an incomplete, temporary, superficial, experience-based and self-centered phenomenon, which focuses on the natural realm and, even if there are any claims of the transcendent experience, those claims are ignored. This new kind of mysticism seems to be flourishing and replacing classical mysticism. The phrases Jones uses to label these phenomena are mostly derogatory, namely superficial spirituality, Buddhism Lite, watered-down spirituality, naturalistic spirituality. Today's mysticism entails both change and loss of

---

<sup>34</sup> See footnote no. 33.

<sup>35</sup> The Cambridge English dictionary's definitions are used regarding the words: tradition(al), classical, rigorous are used from. URL: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/> For the interpretation of rest of the words I am using the textual context as I consider this a much more expressive and specific source, than their definitions.

<sup>36</sup> One of the synonyms for the phenomenon of classical mysticism

tradition. Change of tradition is understood in the sense that it appropriates traditional techniques and teachings. Mindfulness meditation is mentioned as an example - as it is common, popular and far from traditional teachings in the ways it is used.<sup>37</sup> Tradition is moving out of the focus by people ignoring traditional religious metaphysics, traditional religious goals, mystical and monastic ethical codes, and eventually discontinues.<sup>38</sup>

The concept of spirituality is essential for understanding today's religious phenomena, and as a phrase it is used with different meanings in the Jones' epilogue which highlight different stages of the process of spirituality replacing mysticism. Between the 1950s and 1980s, spirituality increasingly began to signify a tradition in world religions, focusing on the personal and experiential levels. "Rigorous traditional spirituality" is used in this sense. On the other hand, *New Age spirituality*, *watered-down spirituality*, *superficial spirituality*, and *naturalistic spirituality replacing classical mysticism* highlight further meanings of the word and stages of the "takeover." Carrette and King argue that interest in the notion of spirituality started to increase in the 1950s and was closely knit to the the mystical, but slowly the term replaced the notion of mysticism. Spirituality fit into "secular" markets with its de-traditionalized and this-worldly character, while mysticism remained associated with ancient traditions and otherworldliness. This resulted in a preference for spirituality and mysticism losing its popular appeal (Carrette & King, 2005, pp. 42-44). Carrette and King argue that this process of turning religion into a psychological event is an ideological process, which results in the favoring of the internal economy of the self over the external economy of social relations, and therefore is essentially connected to the history of western capitalism (Carrette & King, 2005, pp. 68-69).

Spirituality is now a private, psychological event that refers to a whole range of experiences that float about on the boundaries of religious traditions. "The lack of specificity allows it to be effective in the marketplace and reduces its concern for social ethics and cultural location. [...] In transpersonal psychology spirituality emerges as a product of religious fragmentation and eclecticism, hidden in the psychological structures of individualism. It is a box without content, because the content has been thrown out and what is left is a set of psychological descriptions with no referent" (Carrette & King, 2005, p. 73).

### Future of mysticism

Without some injection of personal spiritual experience — for theists, some kind of encounter with a living god — religion becomes no more than a social club with a bloodless metaphysics, and probably suffocatingly dogmatic, if doctrines are taken

---

<sup>37</sup> Buddhist teachings of selflessness transformed in psychotherapy to enhance the sense of self (Jones, 2016, p. 336).

<sup>38</sup> „Traditional religious metaphysics and transcendent goals are ignored; traditional mystical ethical codes are at best watered down. For example, one can adopt aspects of a Buddhist way of life while being agnostic about its factual claims about rebirth and karma (Batchelor 1997). A total inner transformation is not always the goal. Teachers of complicated metaphysical doctrines are no longer needed, nor is adherence to difficult monastic ethical codes. Traditional meditative techniques may be adopted to calm the mind or to focus attention fully on the present [...]” (Jones, 2016, pp. 336-337).

seriously (Jones, 2016, p. 338). At this point it is clear that Jones perceives classical mysticism as decreasing and does not find today's mysticism suitable for the religious reawakening that he envisions (Jones, 2016, pp. 343-346). Therefore, he describes a future form of mysticism that would live up to both modern challenges and traditional standards. He comes up with several possible names to define this new form of mysticism, which include the following: bifurcated mystically informed life, new mystical systems in association with science and modern cultural interests, truncated mysticism, revamped mysticism, reinvigorated mysticism. From now on I will use the name mystical systems as a reference.

Cognitive claims of mystical experiences are unverifiable so they face the challenge of demonstrating a different form of value to scientific knowledge. Jones thinks that new mystical systems should supplement science with this different type of knowledge in a way that both science and mysticism are accepted as knowledge-giving processes. Jones believes that the cognitive claims of introvertive mystical experiences about the transcendent can still be accepted while fully affirming science.<sup>39</sup>

New mystical systems should therefore incorporate transcendent and immanent dimensions. On the one hand, it means the defense of the transcendent – just like classical mystics did. On the other hand, it means giving full reality to the natural realm by taking it seriously when it comes to interpreting introvertive experiences and not forgetting action and this-worldliness on a daily basis. Therefore, complete selflessness, ascetic renunciation, sole focus on the present, neglecting the body and not reflecting on sufferings in the world is no longer an option. The phrase 'bifurcated mysticism' highlights the question of whether a two-focused life is attainable for mystics. Jones calls this a truncated form of mysticism, where mysticism somewhat loses its autonomy and gives equal weight to a non-mystical point of view. This would mean that successful mysticism would replace the totally transcendent image of the deity with one that is also immanent in space and time. Nonetheless, mysticism would gain scientific (and therefore public) acceptance.<sup>40</sup>

It is interesting to note that Jones considers the focus on mystical experiences exaggerated (solidified by William James) when it comes to scientific research on mystical experiences. However, from the perspective of the vitality of religious traditions he seems to agree with James (2002, p. 29), for whom this vitality appears as an essential aspect of bringing mysticism into focus (Croce, 2013). When Jones contemplates the role of mysticism in the future of religion, he refers to Karl Rahner, Robert Ellwood and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan – who share the same view on the vitality of religious - and particularly mystical - experiences. He shares his views/visions of a religious re-awakening, in which mysticism plays an important role. He sees today's people as the "spiritual heirs of all the

---

<sup>39</sup> "Thus, it is possible to forge a conciliation of mysticism and science that accepts both endeavors as knowledge-giving (see also Jones 2010: 261-76). This means that it is not necessary to naturalize introvertive mystical experiences for a reconciliation: one can accept the classical mystical position that these experiences involve transcendent realities while still fully affirming science" (Jones, 2016, pp. 342-343).

<sup>40</sup> "But such a conciliation removes one objection to the cognitive validity of introvertive mystical experiences by showing that their claims to be an awareness of a transcendent reality are consistent with science's cognitive claims" (Jones, 2016, p. 343).

major religious traditions”<sup>41</sup> who shall use and develop contemplative traditions, not only for the suggested vitality of religions and society, but also because humanity could benefit from it.<sup>42</sup> *“They may help us overcome a sense of alienation from the natural world and give us a sense of being connected to the world and to each other that will affect how we see ourselves and treat others and how we act in the world”* (Jones, 2016, p. 345). Although he outlined this vision, Jones does not think mystics will bring about any significant changes in the near future (Jones, 2016, p. 346).

Today’s mystical phenomena are almost completely set aside by Jones, as they does not fulfil all the criteria of classical mysticism. From Jones’ perspective, this version of mysticism is not considered “serious” and it is not taken seriously: it is scientifically ignored. Instead of today’s mysticism he focuses on the characteristics of possible new mystical systems, which seem to represent an adaptive, revised version of classical mysticism. Following Jones’ logic, how can we reflect on today’s mysticism? Are these phenomena dead-ends - something that occurs in the period of transitioning from and to a focus of transcendental dimensions of life? Is this mysticism possibly a bit more significant in the sense that it is the next stage of mystical development? What if traditional mysticism is not able to rise to the challenges of modernity and make a comeback in the form of new mystical systems?

Jones suggests that classical mysticism today is untenable for various reasons (Jones, 2016, pp. 338-340). It seems as though almost all the conditions of mysticism (at least of classical mysticism), are absent in modernity. Following Jones’ logic - does this mean that mysticism is not possible anymore? Or does it mean that there is a mysticism which is possible with different, or fewer, conditions, and therefore the change of mysticism is inevitable? Eisenstadt’s theory of multiple modernities highlights the problem of trying to establish a rigid dichotomy between sacred tradition and secular modernity (Eisenstadt, 2003, pp. 135-166). He suggests that traditions do not end with modernity but continue to live on, transform due to the challenges of modernity, and so also help to shape modernity. As Casanova summarizes it: “Modern traits [...] are not developed necessarily in contradistinction to or even at the expense of tradition, but rather through the transformation and the pragmatic adjustment of tradition” (Casanova, 2006, p. 13).

### **Secularization of mysticism**

Jones’ main idea, articulated in the epilogue, is the Secularization of mystical experiences. As I have pointed out above, this idea relies heavily on Jones’ understanding of mysticism, resulting in the inclusion of traditional forms of mysticism and the exclusion of today’s mysticism. Secularization of mysticism entails a twofold trend related to modernity and particularly to contemporary society. On the one hand, Jones notes an

---

<sup>41</sup> Jones, 2016, p. 345

<sup>42</sup> Mysticism would provide an experience-based contact with more of reality (more than the natural realm), would help people being more fully human, to a more meaningful life, optimistic outlook on life, moral development and more compassion for others (Jones, 2016, pp. 341-342, 345).



increase in today's mysticism (i.e., mystical experiences absorbed into parts of modern culture), and a decrease in classical mysticism, on the other. Besides the definition of mysticism, an understanding of modernity and secularization might help to unravel the notion of secularization of mysticism. In general, modernity is primarily defined by Jones in terms of its opposition to premodernity, and as entailing a loss of the transcendent dimension. Consequently, contemporary culture is described by Jones in an utterly negative way, in so far as it is unfavorable to classical mysticism. It is an era of uncertainty, an age of distraction, the culture of material values, affluence and comfort, promoting self-assertion. Jones describes this as a civilizational crisis visible in a spiritual malaise and calls for a religious reawakening.

Modern mystical phenomena have a central role in the idea of the secularization of mysticism. At the social level, Jones points out a loss of faith in transcendence, an antimystical climate, and the tendency that the cultivation of mystical experience comes to be incorporated into parts of modern culture. At the group level, he underlines that mysticism is decreasing in major religions, however, from the perspective of the future of religions, mysticism has a vital importance. Finally, in terms of the individual, Jones observes a simultaneous decrease and increase of mysticism, and a change in the practice of mysticism. The decrease is understood related to classical mysticism, while the increase is related to today's mysticism. The change in the practice of mysticism is described with the idea of watered-down spirituality – picking and choosing mystical practices. Overall, the idea of the differentiation of the secular sphere can be found in the loss of the transcendental dimension of life and the influence of the immanent dimension on thinking and experiencing. Future mysticism as imagined by Jones is a phenomenon which brings back the transcendental dimension and connects it with the immanent.

I consider the phrase, *secularization of mystical experiences* somewhat inaccurate for the concept that Jones describes. As he points out in certain parts of the epilogue, mystical experiences are common and widespread (Jones, 2016, pp. 336, 338). They might have changed due to consequences related to modernity, but they certainly are not in decline (which is the overall meaning of secularization as he uses it). What is in decline, which Jones generally seems to lament, is the long-term engagement with traditions. This means engagement prior to the experience (teachings, techniques, etc.), and following the experience (full transformation of life based on the mystical experience). The secularization of mystical experiences could be an appropriate phrase for the differentiation of mystical experiences from mysticism as a whole. Otherwise, the phrase *secularization of mysticism* would be more suitable to describe this concept. All in all, I consider the use of the phrase secularization in the epilogue, not as a scientific theory but as a general concept which articulates religious decline in a widely understandable way.

This word aids Jones in expressing what seems like an impression of today's mystical landscape, rather than representing a scientific endeavor. Nevertheless, the impressions he touches upon are/were scientifically relevant and may contribute to furthering the scientific understanding of today's mystical phenomena.

Jones describes his vision of future mysticism as a twofold change in mysticism. On the one hand, the return to tradition - a process which to some extent would go against the current trend of the secularization of mysticism. On the other hand, a change towards meeting the challenges of modernity - a similar process to the idea of tradition's place in modernity suggested by Eisenstadt. Overall, Jones seems to promote a "secularized" and practical version of traditional mysticism - a version of mysticism which takes the phenomenal world seriously in explanation and action while not forgetting about the transcendent experience. It is a kind of mysticism that takes what was experienced and applies it to the natural realm. He thinks that the loss of focus towards the transcendent is what is missing from mysticism today; and the complete focus, which existed in premodernity, cannot be regained, because we live in a secularized world. He admits that the concept of this bifurcated/truncated/revamped mysticism is problematic. Does mysticism lose essential characteristics by making a compromise and adapting to the secularized world? How can that which is ineffable be translated into action and word without altering it to a great extent? It is interesting to note that he uses similar arguments to what he criticized in today's mysticism - for presenting the idea and the usefulness of the new mystical systems. He imagines mysticism as present and having beneficial effects on individuals and on society<sup>43</sup> - just slightly different effects than the ones he deems as self-centered.

As mentioned above, Jones quotes Karl Rahner, Robert Ellwood and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan who share an emphasis on the vital aspect of mystical experiences. Mysticism would be reintroducing the ontic realm in our life on an experiential and individual basis. The latter two aspects of it: experientiality and individuality might be the major reasons why mystical experiences are popular today. As Jones rightly points out, it answers many of the questions and problems of modern people: it is temporary, it offers the possibility of connection with other people, it is flexible in the sense that mystical experiences can happen outside of the institutional context, it can be a temporary adventure leading to something traditional - as deep as the person wants to dive, it offers a great variety one can pick and choose from - it enables experimenting and fits the buffered self (Taylor, 2007), and bricolage (Dobbelaere, 1999, p. 2). Based on the ideas of Carrette and King, this phenomenon can be called a free-market spirituality, celebrating the individual (2005, pp. 66-69). This is the current state of a process rooted in Protestant

---

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 41.

ideas, starting with the psychologization of religion at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the privatization of it: a focus on mystical experiences expressed by James and adopted by many and applied far beyond the original limits of the theory. These authors consider the process of psychologisation essentially linked to capitalism.

### Questions and conclusions

Does, or could, mysticism in fact have a distinctive role in secularization and the future of religion in modernity as Jones suggests?<sup>44</sup> Casanova considers the predictions of Troeltsch and James about the central role of mysticism as an individual form of religiosity to be accurate; and the so-called invisible religion<sup>45</sup> to be gaining global prominence. Moreover, Casanova argues that this is a novelty only from a Western perspective, as mysticism has always been an important option for the religious virtuosi and elites of Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism (Casanova, 2006, p. 18). In the “West,” William James is credited - or blamed - for establishing the focus on direct experiences of the ultimate and therefore favoring a spiritual elite, who get religion at first hand, and the average practitioners, who get it second hand – seem to be neglected. Croce (2013) argues that James’s approach is a democratization of religion instead of elitism. He mentions that James emphasizes the presence of a spiritual potential in all humanity – and instead of focusing on the transcendent for deepest meaning, he refocuses attention toward the “independent” – the significance of depth psychology in each person. Furthermore, he points out that James does not neglect the communal and institutional aspects of religion, rather highlights the importance of the personal, experiential and direct aspect of it. Adding to this focus, the general and wide-spread availability of religious options as presented to modern people – “from the most “primitive” to the most “modern” [are] often detached from their temporal and spatial contexts, ready for flexible or fundamentalist individual appropriation” (Casanova, 2006, p. 18)

There is a wide variety of religious and mystical phenomena on all three levels today, not only from the perspective of the “consumers”, but from the point of view of scholars as well. Instead of generally ignoring these, or deeming them as a decline because it is not what it was, we might instead ask some questions. The empirical evidence suggests that secularization can no longer be maintained in a general sense. In response, Peter L. Berger introduced a new paradigm based on the implications of the phenomenon of pluralism to tackle the co-existence of different religions and the

---

<sup>44</sup> “Without some injection of personal spiritual experience—for theists, some encounter with a living god—religion becomes no more than a social club with a bloodless metaphysics (and probably suffocatingly dogmatic, if doctrines are taken seriously)” (Jones, 2016, p. 338).

<sup>45</sup> A form of individual religiosity – described by Thomas Luckmann. (Luckmann, 1967)

coexistence of religious and secular discourses (Berger, 2014). Pluralism is able to reflect on the fluid construction and existence of new religious phenomena, instead of focusing on a rigid dichotomy of sacred/religious and secular. Pluralism compels the individual to make choices between different religious and non-religious possibilities. The focus on the individual, compelled to choose between the variety of religious and non-religious possibilities, however, could be brought into question by the perspectives presented by Carrette and King (2005) and shared by Jones.

Mysticism with its traditionality and otherworldly focus seems to be lost next to the appealing spirituality of today's people. Jones takes the standpoint of the defender and uses arguments that completely diminish today's spiritual and mystical phenomena. I suspect the solution lies somewhere in between, reflecting on the scientific understanding of mysticism and re-introducing and proposing new questions such as: How do we define mysticism today? How do we categorize the never before seen variety and quantity of experiences? What are the criteria for considering an experience mystical? How do we deal scientifically with present-day mystical experiences and those who call themselves mystics? Are we forgetting about those simply because they do not fit the definitions, which are mainly based on experiences from the previous era? The fact that modern mysticism is not considered serious when the criteria of classical mysticism are applied to it does not mean that it should not be taken seriously by scientific research.

### References

Berger, P.L. (2014). *The Many Altars of Modernity. Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*. Boston: De Gruyter.

Berger, P.L. (1967). *The sacred canopy; elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday.

Carrette, J. and King, R. (2005). *Selling Spirituality. The Silent Takeover of Religion*. London: Routledge.

Casanova, J. (2006). 'Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective.' *The Hedgehog Review*, No. 8, pp. 1-2.

Croce, P. (2013). 'Spilt Mysticism: William James's Democratization of Religion.' *William James Studies*, Vol. 9, pp 33-26.

Dobbelaere, K. (1999). 'Towards an Integrated Perspective of the Processes Related to the Descriptive Concept of Secularization.' *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 60, No. 3, pp. 229-247.

Eisenstadt, S. (2003). *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities. Part 1*. Leiden: Brill.

Forman, R.K.C. (1990), "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting", in Robert K.C. Forman (ed.) *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

James, W. (2002). *Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*. London: Routledge.

Jones, R.H. (2016). *Philosophy of Mysticism – Raids on the Ineffable*. Albany: SUNY press.

Luckmann, T. (1967). *The invisible religion; the problem of religion in modern society*. New York: Macmillan.

Máté-Tóth, A. (2014). *Vallásnézet. A kelet-közép-európai átmenet vallástudományi értelmezése*. Kolozsvár: Korunk-Komp-Press.

Otto, R. (1932). *Mysticism East and West. A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*. London: Macmillan and Co.

Schroeder, T. (1921). 'Secularized mystics.' *Open Court*, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 163-171

Stace, W.T. (1960). *Mysticism and Philosophy*. St. Martin's Press.

Taylor, C. (2007). *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Troeltsch, E. (1912). *Protestantism and Progress a Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World*. Beacon Press.

Wilson, B.R. (1966). *Religion in secular society: a sociological comment*. London: Watts.

**Online references**

Classical, rigorous, tradition, traditional. In: *Cambridge English Dictionary*. Retrieved 12 February 2020 from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>

Gellman, Jerome, "Mysticism". In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved 12 February 2020 from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/mysticism/>

Gellman, Jerome (2016). Review of Jones, Richard H.'s *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable*. Retrieved 12 February 2020 from: <http://readingreligion.org/books/philosophy-mysticism>

Miller, Michael (2017). Review of Jones, Richard H.'s *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. Retrieved 12 February 2020 from: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49662>

Ralph. W. Hood, Jr. Review of Jones, Richard H.'s *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable*. Retrieved 12 February 2020 from: <http://www.richardjonesbooks.com/index.html>