

**BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**Kierkegaard's Conception of Faith:  
Response to Individual Secularization**

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# **BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS**

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## Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is my own and has been not published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used literature and other sources are attributed and cited in references.

Due to not being a native speaker in the language that this work has been written in, I used an additional help. I opted for an occasional use of the grammatical correction tool provided by Grammarly.com. I declare that in no way, form or shaped used the mentioned tool to enhance, rewrite or change the sentences in the work other than some specific words in it.

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Signature\_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

The main focus of this thesis is two ideas: the idea of faith and the idea of secularization. This thesis first demonstrates the underlying notion of secularization through sufficient empirical data. Further analyzing the concept of secularization, I recognize its multifaceted and multilayered nature. In exploring the former, I will use Shinner's (1967) analysis; for the latter, I will incorporate the multilayered theory of Dobbelaere (2000). Through Shinner and Dobbelaere, this will demonstrate that secularization at an individual level results in a complete disappearance of the religion. However, through Frankl's writing, I want to explain why and how religion is essential and crucial for human beings. Overall, Frankl's theory emphasizes the need for religion and the negative impact of its demise. Moreover, Frankl emphasizes the dangers of a religion-free world, asserting human dependence on faith for meaning. Frankl argues that nurturing faith is the highest passion, essential for fulfilling human desires. Following Frankl's pessimistic predictions, this thesis embarked on the analytical journey of faith. Thesis will explain different definitions of faith. However, Kierkegaard's conception of faith will be the primary concept. Further exploration of Kierkegaard's faith will emphasize its absurd, challenging, and subjective nature. In the context of increasing secularization, Kierkegaard's conception of faith

highlights its challenges and intricacies. His conception emphasizes individual and private experience, crucial for preserving religious harmony and satisfying the fundamental desire for meaning. Faith meets the inherent human desire for meaning, becoming the ultimate purpose. Without faith, the quest for meaning remains unmet, underscoring its significance in human existence.

*Keywords: Faith, secularization, religion, Kierkegaard, Frankl, meaning.*

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## **Abstrakt**

Hlavným predmetom skúmania tejto bakalárskej práce sú dve základné myšlienky: myšlienka viery a sekularizácie. V úvode práce sa zameriavam na koncept sekularizácie a stúpajúcu tendenciu sekularizácie v spoločnosti, ktorú dokazujem prostredníctvom empirických dát. Dôkladná analýza konceptu sekularizácie má za cieľ identifikovať jeho mnohostrannú a viacvrstvovú povahu. Pri analýze prvého aspektu sa opieram o analýzu od Shinnera (1967), zatiaľ čo pre druhý aspekt využívam viacvrstvovú teóriu od Dobbelaera (2000). Na základe analýzy Shinnera a Dobbelaera budeme chápať sekularizáciu na individuálnej úrovni, ktorá vedie k úplnému zániku náboženstva. Avšak, prostredníctvom analýzy Franklových textov vysvetľujem dôvody a spôsoby, prečo je náboženstvo nevyhnutné a dôležité pre človeka. Celkovo zdôrazňujem, že Franklova teória poukazuje na potrebu náboženstva a ukazuje negatívne dopady pri jeho absencii v živote človeka. Frankl rovnako upozorňuje na nebezpečenstvo sveta bez náboženstva, tvrdiac, že ľudia potrebujú vieru pre zmysel. Frankl argumentuje, že kultivácia viery je najväčšou vášňou, nevyhnutnou pre uspokojenie ľudských túžob. Po Franklových pesimistických predpovediach sa práca zameria na analýzu viery. V práci predstavím rôzne interpretácie viery. Kierkegaardovo chápanie viery považujem za najhlbšie a najkritickejšie. Ďalšie skúmanie Kierkegaardovej viery zdôrazní jej absurdnú, náročnú a subjektívnu povahu. V

kontexte narastajúcej sekularizácie Kierkegaardovo chápanie viery poukazuje na jej výzvy a komplikácie. Jeho koncept zdôrazňuje individuálny a súkromný zážitok, ktorý je kľúčový pre udržanie náboženskej harmónie a uspokojenie základnej túžby po význame. Viera uspokojuje vrodenu ľudskú túžbu po význame, stáva sa konečným cieľom. Bez viery zostáva hľadanie významu nenaplnené, čo zdôrazňuje jej význam v ľudskej existencii.

*Kľúčové slová: Viera, sekularizácia, náboženstvo, Kierkegaard, Frankl, význam*

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## Introduction

European society has been experiencing a change in its core values. A once significant role, religious practices, doctrines, and symbols lost their social significance. The rise of secularization, past, present, and future, is no longer a matter of question (Johnson & Grim, 2013; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Burkimsher, 2014). However, secularization enjoys a place deep in European history as a concept that has been around for a long time. The word itself and its meaning have a long and intricate history. Etymologically, the word "Secularization" is rooted in the Latin word "saeculum," signifying the secular or worldly realm in contrast to the eternal, the sacred. However, according to Latré and Vanheeswijck (2015), this is just one of the four historical meanings of the term. Originally, secularization referred to a monk's departure from the monastery and return to worldly life (p. 388). Secondly, the term gained further meaning during the Reformation as Protestant leaders seized church property (Latré & Vanheeswijck, 2015). In the sixteenth century, it was associated with the transformation of religious possessions, such as the conversion of monasteries into hospitals or universities (p. 388). This material interpretation persisted between the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with the Peace of Westphalia and Napoleon's policies that secularized church goods (Latré & Vanheeswijck, 2015). The final layer of meaning emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, depicting secularization as a political project within the secularist movement. Thus, historically, secularization was always referred to as de-religiosity, the transition from sacred and divine to profane, worldly, and secular.

However, in contemporary discussions, secularization extends beyond its historical association solely with religious institutions, its political projects, the transformation of church possessions, and the reintegration of monks into society. Shinner (1967) analyzes five different conceptions of secularization which are being used. He writes about *decline of religion*, *conformity with 'this world'*, *disengagement of society from religion*, *transposition of religious beliefs and institutions*, and *the desacralization of the world*. Shinner (1967) mentions one more conception of

secularization, however, due to its vagueness in definition and explanation<sup>1</sup> it will not be mentioned in the rest of the analysis. Moreover, besides the multifaceted nature of the concept, secularization is also claimed to be multilayered. Secularization has been viewed as a process across three distinct levels: societal, institutional, and individual (Dobbelaere, 1981 & 2002). The societal and institutional levels focus on aspects such as material possessions, political separation, and the detachment of these goods from the church (Dobbelaere, 2002). Whereas the societal and institutional are concerned primarily with the material and the society as a whole, the individual level of secularization is interested in the behaviors and thoughts of its members. More concerning, both Shinner (1967) and Dobbelaere (1981 & 2002) have noticed that individual secularization leads to a world without religion.

However, the power of religion spans from the earliest recordings. The Christian religion and its faith influenced the modern development of Europe. From the Roman emperor Constantine and later Theodosius I up until today, Christianity is the most prominent religion in Europe. Nevertheless, the understanding of the concept of religion has varied across centuries being a subject of enduring debates. The forerunner of modern anthropology, Tylor B. Edward, defines religion as the belief in spiritual beings (1903, p. 424). There is substantial evidence at disposal, claims Tylor (1903), that supports the notion that belief in spiritual beings is a shared feature among all societies. Tylor's definition, besides encompassing the major religions in Europe, introduces a new concept of "spiritual beings". Émile Durkheim, the father of sociology, expands on this definition by defining spiritual beings. For Durkheim (1965), the term "spiritual beings" refers to conscious entities equipped with abilities surpassing those of ordinary individuals (p. 32). The core purpose of religion, argues Durkheim (1965), is to regulate our relationships with these unique beings through offerings and sacrifices (p. 32). A well-defined framework helps us to differentiate between what qualifies as a religion and what doesn't. Essentially, a religion

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<sup>1</sup> Shinner (1967, p. 216) defines the sixth meaning using a tautology where he explains and defines the concept by using the concept in the explanation. He writes that secularization is "Movement from a "sacred" to a "secular" society".

encompasses the belief in entities with abilities surpassing humans, guiding the relationship through offerings and rituals, often involving acts of sacrifice.

Beliefs in God, an entity with above-human ability, coincide with what some call faith (Luther, 1536; Swinburne, 2005; Plantinga 2000; Calvin, 2002). However, sometimes faith may be seen as an act or a trait where religion may or may not be present (Chappel, 1996; Audi, 2014). Swinburne (2005) argues that faith is the belief in God, intertwined with the conviction of God's love and mercifulness. Almost five centuries before him, Martin Luther (1536) understood faith as a divine gift that requires trust, belief and hope in God. However, conflicting perspectives emerge, exemplified by Immanuel Kant's assertion that faith assumes denying knowledge, in stark contrast to John Calvin's conception of faith as divine knowledge (2002, Book 3). Contemporary Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga (2000) takes Calvin's side and agrees with his assertion. However, Chappel (1996) and Audi (2014) identify faith as a virtuous trait, inherently good and virtuous. Defining and providing a solid ground of reasoning for faith is not a simple matter, and Kant's premise of faith being the opposite of reason may be right. However, where Kant would denounce faith for beginning where thinking stops, Kierkegaard (2005, p. 61) would announce faith exactly where it stops. In "Fear and Trembling," Soren Kierkegaard introduces a unique and profound concept of faith, transcending reason, and embracing irrationality. His understanding of faith touches upon each individual's subjectivity and belief systems. Moreover, he introduces moral and ethical polemics in the name of the innermost subjectivity of each individual. Thus, Kierkegaard's intricate synthesis of irrationality and individuality mixed with faith creates a nuanced and complex understanding.

The ongoing process of secularization in Europe, characterized by the diminishing role of religious practices, invites a profound examination of faith. While historical roots of secularization lie in material and political transformations, contemporary discussions acknowledge its impact on societal, institutional, and notably, individual levels. Scholars like Shinner (1967) and Dobbelaere (1981 & 2002) have raised concerns about a world devoid of religion, highlighting the urgency of addressing individual secularization. Soren Kierkegaard's exploration of faith in "Fear and

"Trembling" provides a unique perspective that transcends reason and embraces irrationality. In the context of individual secularization, Kierkegaard's intricate synthesis of irrationality and individuality emerges as a compelling solution. Thus, the contemporary challenge prompts a reevaluation of the transformative potential of faith. By embracing faith as a deeply personal and moral journey, detached from collective doctrines, there lies an opportunity to counteract the crisis of individual secularization. This approach not only infuses meaning and purpose into individual lives but also reaffirms the enduring significance of faith amidst evolving societal values.

In the face of decreasing religious influence on the individual level, Kierkegaard's notion of faith, centered on individual and subjective experience, emerges as a robust and fitting response to the escalating trend of secularization. Through this thesis, I will first explore the multidimensionality and complexity of secularization. Following that, I will focus on the importance of religion and its purpose. Subsequently, I will explore different understandings of faith, addressing the uniqueness of Kierkegaard's understanding of faith. Finally, I will delve into the contemporary importance and implications of Kierkegaard's conception of faith.

Secularization is a fact, and it is a multifaceted concept present in three layers. The impacts of societal and institutional secularization are not as drastic and negative as those of individual secularization. The culmination of individual secularization is a world fully deprived of religion. However, according to Frankl, religion gives humans meaning and is fundamental to what makes us human. Without religion, the world would lack purpose and meaning, experiencing an existential vacuum. Kierkegaard's concept of faith addresses secularization at the individual level, giving purpose and meaning to the individual. Moreover, Kierkegaard's understanding of faith does not conflict with societal and institutional secularization leaving space for modernity.

## 1. The Concept of Secularization

There is a substantial difference between contemporary European society and that of the 19th and 20th centuries. The difference is notably marked by a significant decline in the influence of religion. Johnson and Grim (2013) in their book "World's Religions in Figures" provide compelling evidence of a noticeable decline in religious adherence, accompanied by a significant rise in the numbers of agnostics and atheists. The data reveals a considerable shift over the century, indicating an increase of 12.2% in agnostics and 2% in atheists from 1910 to 2010 (Johnson & Grim, 2013, p. 87). More notably, the percentage of the total European population identifying as unreligious was merely 0.5% in 1910; however, by 2010, this figure had surged to nearly 15% (Johnson & Grim, 2013, p. 87). Further statistical evidence supporting the trend of secularization and the decline in religious beliefs comes from Norris and Inglehart (2004). Their research highlights significant decrease, mostly in double digits, in the percentage of individuals holding a belief in God or any supernatural being. To arrive at these findings, the authors aggregated data from seven polls conducted across twelve European countries<sup>2</sup>, covering the period from 1947 to 2001 (Norris & Inglehart, 2004, p. 90). Yet other more recent articles conclude similarly. Burkimsher (2014) argues that European religious attendance decreased noticeably between 1990 and 2012. In a 2021 paper conducted by Paul Tromp, Anna Pless, and Dick Houtman, it was found that religious beliefs and practices in Western Europe decreased over the last four decades. This decline applies to both traditional beliefs and a broader sense of spirituality. Overall, it is concluded that fewer people in Western Europe are religious, and more people are leaning towards secular or non-religious beliefs (Tromp, Pless & Houtman, 2021).

The evidence presented thus far supports the underlying notion of secularization and its evident rise in European society. Moreover, secularization has been shown as a complicated concept understood differently by different scholars. Thus, the existence of disagreements, debates, and

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<sup>2</sup> Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, Greece, Germany, Belgium, Finland, France, Switzerland, Austria (Norris & Inglehart, 2004, p. 90).

even contradicting meanings of the concept should not come as a surprise. However, one is true: secularization is a complex and nuanced concept that lacks concrete and holistic definition. Acknowledging this, some scholars have tried to explore the complexity, depth, and intricacies of the concept. Shinner (1967) acknowledges the vast difference in meaning that the concept of secularization. Throughout his article, he explores the multifacetedness of secularization. On the other side, Dobbelaere (1981 & 2002) recognizes other characteristics of this process, mainly that it happens at three levels. Thus, secularization, besides multifacetedness, acquires the multilayered trait through Dobbelaere's theory. He claims that secularization is a process that happens at three levels: societal, organizational (institutional), and individual (Dobbelaere, 1981 & 2002).

Through this work, I will use the revised version of Dobbelaere's secularization theory published in 2002. This chapter first focuses on the multifaceted nature of secularization using Shinner's six meanings (1967). Following that, I will present Dobbelaere's (2002) theory of secularization as a process happening in three layers using the revised version. Throughout it, I will explain each of the layers separately, focusing at the end on the individual level.

### **1.1 Secularization as a multifaceted concept**

Shinner's analysis of secularization is arguably the most influential work that forwarded the secularization theory in the recent decades. In a short paper, Shinner (1967) overviews the concept from its very beginnings until the late 1960s. He begins with a historical introduction of the concept and the earliest mentions of it. Following that, he claims that there are six different meanings of secularization: As a religious decline, as a conformity with the world, as the separation of state from religion, as a transposition of religious institutions, as a desacralization of the world and "Movement from a 'sacred' to a 'secular' society"<sup>3</sup> (Shinner, 1967). He explains each meaning of secularization in three stages. Firstly, he puts forward a general understanding of it. Secondly, provides us with examples, and as a concluding statement, the author critically evaluates them.

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<sup>3</sup> This meaning of secularization will not be mentioned in the analysis. Shinner (1967) tries to define the last meaning of secularization, however, in doing so, he uses the same name and thus performs a tautology.

*Decline of religion*

The first mentioned meaning of secularization is the decline of religion. Shinner (1967) clarifies that by this he understands the decline of the influence of religious symbols, doctrines, and institutions in society (p. 209). He further argues that this decline heads towards the total disappearance of religion from society (p. 209). However, there are a few problems with this meaning. First and foremost, a decline of religion would assume a place and time from when religion started to decline (p. 209). Moreover, it would also presuppose that religion and the understanding of religion stayed the same throughout that time (p. 209-210). However, Shinner (1967) claims that secularists often take medieval Europe as the peak of religion's influence (p. 210). Thus, it is implausible that the same symbols and doctrines of religion stayed, and it is even more challenging to get the picture of what they understood by it. Very few sources could provide us with the degree and type of religiosity in medieval Europe.

*Conformity with 'this world'*

The second meaning that Shinner explains is what he calls "Conformity with 'this world'." Secularization thus becomes the changing of focus from the supernatural towards the natural (p. 211). This conception of secularization argues that European society is redirecting its attention from the religious realm into the realm of science. With it, society would be reduced to pragmatic tasks, similar to J.M. Stuart's theory of utilitarianism. However, again, this understanding of secularization assumes a division of worlds (p. 211). The assumption is that there are two worlds that can exist, "this world", an unreligious, scientific, and pragmatic world, and the "other world" where religion has influence (p. 212). Shinner's main criticism of this view of secularization is the vague and undefined dichotomy of the pragmatical "this world" and the religious "that world".

*Disengagement of society from religion*

Shinner understands this meaning as the separation of society together with its public affairs (p. 212). Thus, at the end of this process, religion would become a purely individual, private affair. Secularization, therefore, is understood as the separation of those institutions that do not have a

place in the sphere of religion. According to Shinner (1967), historians recognize two forms of this type of secularization: intellectual-existential and institutional-social (p. 212). What is commonly referred to as institutional secularization is the transfer of religious institutions to state institutions (p. 212-213). Thus, consequently, we could assert that the state is secular if the religious institutions are now part of the state institutions (p. 213). One example is the transfer of educational and welfare institutions. Once they were a religious institutions, now they are a state institutions (p. 213). The intellectual-existential form of this meaning of secularization refers to the pursuit of establishing a sphere of knowledge free from any supernatural assumptions. From this understanding usually stems the secularization of science or law (Shinner, 1967, p. 213). The main problem with understanding secularization as the disengagement of society from religion is the lack of clarity (p. 213). There is not a clear picture of where it began or at which stage it is currently. Furthermore, it is not often clear whether society is disengaged from religion or whether it is in uniformity with the faith and understanding of religion (p. 213).

#### *Transposition of religious beliefs and institutions*

Unlike the previous meaning of secularization, where private religion was allowed, this understanding of secularization does not allow that. The transposition process would be achieved by removing any sacred or religious context from every institution (Shinner, 1967, p. 214). Consequentially, understanding secularization as the dissolving of the religious institutions in the state apparatus can also be valid here. The author mentions two fallacies concerning this line of argumentation (p. 215). The first problem with it is figuring out if something that claims to come from religious beliefs is genuinely coming from there or if it is something similar. For example, an argument can be made that Marxism borrowed ideas from Jewish-Christian beliefs (Shinner, p. 215). Essentially, the question should focus on whether certain ideas come from religion or are completely new. The second issue is whether it can be asserted that certain ideas are exclusively associated with and belong to certain religions, and the adoption of them by other groups appears as a form of appropriation (p. 215).

#### *The desacralization of the world*

The author explains the meaning of this concept as the process where people are rationalizing every bit of nature's supernatural, mystic, and secret character, morphing it into one rational-causal explanation (Shinner, p. 215). The final product of this process would be a fully rational world without any supernatural questions or answers (p. 215-216). However, according to Shinner (p. 216), not all proponents of this conception agree on the desirable outcome of the process. Mainly, it is a question of whether total desacralization is possible or whether the society will find new, not sacred forms of beliefs (p. 216).

## **1.2 Secularization as a multidimensional concept**

The multidimensionality of secularization has never been better investigated and explained than in Dobbelaere's (2002) three levels of analysis. He argues that secularization evolved from its original concept, primarily focusing on the societal process of removing institutions from the religious sphere (p. 25). Later, sociologists expanded the term to encompass the individual (p. 25). Individuals were considered secularized when their engagement with the church declined (p. 25). This shift implies a diminishing participation in religious practices. I will begin explaining the societal level, after which I will continue with the institutional and conclude with the individual level of secularization.

### *Societal level*

At the societal stage of secularization, which is examined at a macro level, religion undergoes a transformation, diminishing in significance to become merely one subsystem alongside others. This process results in the loss of its once-overarching claim, as highlighted by Dobbelaere (2002, p. 24). Through this, a heterogeneous society is being created, where religion, as a subsystem, coexists with other subsystems. In this context, Dobbelaere (2002) acknowledges three interpretations by Shinner that either complement or, at the very least, do not conflict with his theory. When secularization is interpreted as *the detachment of society from religion, the transfer of religious beliefs and institutions, and the desacralization of the world*, it suggests a societal context. Society disengages from religion through the transposition of religious beliefs, resulting

in a diminishing sense of sacredness in the world. In summary, the three meanings proposed by Shinner (pp. 212-216) are either in correlation or, at the very least, aligned with the initial, macro-level aspect of secularization.

*Organizational (institutional) level*

Dobbelaere (2002) distinguishes between institutional, societal, and individual secularization. He claims that institutional secularization is concerned with the transformation within religious institutions such as churches, denominations, and sects (p. 25). This transformation involves a shift in beliefs, morals, and rituals. At the institutional level, the theory encompasses both the decline and emergence of religious groups (p. 25). This theory also overlaps with another meaning of secularization defined by Shinner (1967), *conformity with 'this world'* (p. 211-212). In short, secularization at the institutional level is a process of adaptation to the current values in the world. Again, both Dobbelaere (2002) and Shinner (1967) agree that this level of analysis and its meaning are distinct from the other.

*Individual level*

As distinct as it is, the individual is perhaps the most recognizable. According to Dobbelaere (2002, p. 25), at this level, the focus is on the harmony between the religion and its members. It involves measuring the degree of alignment of the norms within religious groups, including beliefs, rituals, and morals, with the attitudes and conduct of their members (p. 25). This level of analysis is concerned with evaluating the thoughts and behaviors of the members and their conformity with the religious rules (p. 25). The current level of analysis coincides with Shinner's first conception of secularization, the *decline of religion*. What Shinner (1967) meant by 'decline of religion' is the diminishing influence and significance of religious symbols, doctrines, and beliefs in society (p. 209). He states that the final product of this decline is a complete religiousness of the society, in other words, a world without religion (Shinner, 1967, p. 209). In contrast, other conceptions, which involve shifts in focus, separation of society from religion, removal of religious context from institutions, and rationalization of nature, do not necessarily result in the complete disappearance

of religion<sup>4</sup>. Thus, at the individual level, declining religious thoughts and beliefs lead to a world without religion. At this, both Shinner and Dobbelaere are in agreement (Shinner, p. 209; Dobbelaere p. 25).

The exploration of secularization through Dobbelaere's (2002) three levels reveals its intricate dimensions. Societal secularization unfolds as a macro-level transformation, with religion becoming one subsystem among many (p. 25). Interpretations by Shinner on detachment, transposition, and desacralization align with this societal level. Institutional secularization, distinct from other levels, involves transforming and adapting religious institutions in a state (p. 25). At the individual level, Shinner's concept of the decline of religion resonates, suggesting that individual secularization uniquely leads to a world without religion. Unlike other conceptions, such as shifts in focus or rationalization, individual secularization stands out as a key driver toward the complete disappearance of religion.

### 1.3 Summary

The transformation of European society is visible and underlines significant shifts in the societal landscape. I presented empirical findings outlined by Johnson and Grim (2013), Norris and Inglehart (2004), Burkimsher (2014), and a 2021 research paper authored by Tromp et al. This societal transformation is characterized by a substantial decrease in the influence of religion over time. Statistical data reveals a discernible rise in the numbers of agnostics and atheists (Johnson & Grim, 2013, p. 87), accompanied by a noteworthy decline in religious beliefs and practices (Tromp, et al., 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2004, p. 90). The cumulative effect depicts a broader societal trend in Western Europe toward secular or non-religious perspectives. However, at the center of all this empirical evidence is the complexity of secularization and its multifaceted, multilayered nature.

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<sup>4</sup> The second conception, "*Conformity with This World*", indicates a shift of focus from the religious realm to the domain of science (p. 211-212). Moving forward, the "*Disengagement of Society from Religion*" represents an understanding of secularization that culminates by separating society, public affairs, and institutions from religion, leading to the privatization of religious beliefs (p. 212-213). The following, fourth conception, "*Transposition of Religious Beliefs and Institutions*," involves the removal of any sacred or religious context from institutions (p. 214-215). Finally, the "*Desacralization of the World*" achieves its goal of secularization by rationalizing nature's supernatural aspects, resulting in a fully rational world without supernatural inquiries or responses (p. 215-216).

To investigate the complex nature of the concept, I sought help from scholars like Larry Shinner and Karel Dobbelaere. Shinner (1967) explored the multifaceted theme of secularization and proposed six distinct meanings of secularization. Through his article, he provides a nuanced understanding of the concept while exploring the different meanings of it. The text further introduces Dobbelaere's (2002) three-level analysis (societal, institutional, and individual) highlighting the individual level as the most impactful. This comprehensive exploration underscores secularization as a nuanced and multidimensional concept.

Dobbelaere's intricate exploration of societal, institutional, and individual secularization unveils a nuanced narrative where the individual level enjoys a pivotal role in steering society toward a world without religion. Dobbelaere creates a direct link between the individual level of analysis and Shinner's (1967) first conception of secularization. Shinner claims that the main characteristic of this conception of secularization is the reduced influence of religious beliefs, practices, and doctrines (p. 209). Therefore, the synthesis suggests that the central factor in a world without religion is the diminishing impact of beliefs, practices, and doctrines at the individual level. This raises crucial questions about the nature of faith and the importance of religion itself. Thus, our exploration now shifts gears, turning the spotlight onto the multifaceted dimensions of faith and the importance that religion holds. The transformative influence of individual secularization has instigated a reassessment of the religion and its importance in the world. Building upon the intricate exploration of individual secularization in the previous chapter, it lays the foundation for the upcoming sections, delving into the intricacies of the concept of faith and the exploration of the importance of religion.

## 2. Religion and its importance

Secularization is increasing on all three levels, with the most concerning impact occurring at the individual level. Both, Shinner (1967) and Dobbelaere (2002) sound the alarm of the dangerous outcome of individuals secularization. Individuals are witnessing a growing decline in their religious practices, doctrines, and beliefs, which in turn affects their thoughts and behaviors. According to Dobbelaere and Shinner, these signs point towards a world without religion. However, according to Frankl (2000), a world free from religious beliefs and higher meanings directly and negatively impacts human health. Frankl (2000) recognizes the importance of the religion and its influence and thus sees its decline and demise as an overall negative development. As a psychiatrist, he asserts that the disappearance of religion would have a destructively negative impact on the human health (Frankl, 2000). During this chapter, I will present Frankl's arguments underscoring the importance of religion. Moreover, I will explore the challenges set for us in the world deprived from religion.

Throughout his writings, the Austrian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Victor Frankl (1905-1997) introduced and gave birth to many concepts. As a psychiatrist, Frankl (2000; 1988) recognizes the widespread existential frustration and the surge of depression. In his professional opinion, this is caused by the overwhelming sense of emptiness and a lack of purpose (Frankl 1959; 1988; 2000). He claims that a growing number of individuals find themselves tormented by a sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness, often explained as a feeling of emptiness (2000, p. 139). He refers to this emptiness as an "existential vacuum," which reflects the condition where people are experiencing a profound lack of significance or direction in their lives (p. 139). The existential vacuum is a recurring concept throughout his writings and lectures. He describes it as an endless and constant search for meaning (Frankl, 1959). However, as he states, this constant search for meaning is an inherently human desire (Frankl 2000; 1988). Thus, this human desire for meaning is causing a perpetual creation and enlargement of the existential vacuum (Frankl, 1959).

Nevertheless, not everything can be explained in meaningful, rational terms. According to Frankl (2000, p. 146), no matter how much we want to rationalize our meaning, there is still something irrational left. The probability of everything being meaningless is equally possible as the probability of there being an ultimate meaning (Frankl, 2000). This suggests, according to Frankl (2000), that each individual must make a personal choice. Either you believe that everything is meaningful and your desire for meaning is satisfied, or you take the other path of eternal meaninglessness. Religion, according to Frankl (2000) is the thing that connects both paths into one ultimate meaning. Frankl defines religion more broadly as a system of symbols, symbols which humans cannot conceptualize (2000, p. 148-149). However, the creation, use, and the underlying need for such symbols are essential characteristics of human beings (2000, p. 149). Thus, Frankl writes of religion as something inseparable from humans. He claims that it is the outcome and result of the most human of all human phenomena, the 'will to meaning' (2000, p. 148-150). Therefore, as a natural outgrowth or consequence of our subjective desire for meaning, religion itself has its aim at fulfilling the 'ultimate meaning,' (2000, p. 153).

In conclusion, Viktor Frankl (1959; 1988; 2000), introduces unique concepts that delve into the human quest for meaning. Central to his work is the recognition of widespread existential frustration and the surge of depression as the result of the sense of emptiness and meaninglessness. However, he points out that the decision whether everything is meaningless or there is meaningful relies upon each individual (Frankl, 2000). Whenever the individual desired to explain the meaninglessness and to rationalize it, he created and used symbols (p. 148-149). Thus, for Frankl (2000), religion is a system of symbols representing meaninglessness. Thereafter, the usage, creation and need for these symbols are recognized as fundamental aspects of human nature (Frankl, 2000). In essence, religion becomes the explanation, the symbol, of the essential human quest for meaning. Thus, a world without religion would be stripped of the symbols that are part of our human nature, which represent our fundamental human desire for meaning. The lack of these fundamental symbols the human's desire for meaning will resurface as an existential vacuum.

### 3. The Concept of Faith

Acknowledging the challenges posed by the diminishing impact of religious influence, we embark on a journey to unravel the historical conceptualizations and practices of faith. Through thoroughly examining the concept of faith, we seek to gain insights into the complex interplay between faith, religion and secularization. Faith is a concept that has enjoyed different interpretations through the centuries, and there has been a long-lasting debate on finding the universal concept of faith. It has been defined as a psychological state of trust, belief, or hope, even as a gift from God (Luther, 1536, p. 160). The idea of faith generates many different conceptions. Some of them even contradict each other. For instance, Immanuel Kant (1922) holds that attaining faith presupposes denying knowledge (p. 700). On the other hand, John Calvin (2002) understands faith as the knowledge of the divine (Book 3). Currently, some authors agree with Calvin's conception, more notably the modern Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga (2000). A similar but yet different one is Swinburne's (2005) conception of faith. He holds that faith is a belief in God and cannot exist without the belief in God's love and mercifulness. Being a force of good and being recognized as an inherently positive conception, faith is seen by Chappel (1996) and Audi (2014) as a virtuous trait. Both (Chappel & Audi) argue similarly that having faith is a characterological virtue because it is inherently good.

Throughout the following section, I will analyze the concept of faith through different understandings. In doing so, I will use new and old Christian philosophers, from John Calvin and Martin Luther to Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburn. Following that, I will lay down Kierkegaard's conception of faith as argued in his book, "Fear and Trembling." Accordingly, I will highlight the uniqueness of Kierkegaard's conception of faith.

#### **3.1 Different understandings of faith**

The reformist John Calvin (2002, Book 3) understood faith as a firm and certain knowledge of God's kind-heartedness towards us. Thus, placing the object of faith in recognizing God and Christ rather than in Christian institutions. Moreover, in the Calvinist (2002, Chapter 2) view, the crucial

step to achieving faith is having hope and unconditional trust in God. In this sense, faith is acknowledging God's existence with wholeheartedly hoping and trusting his word. A modern interpretation of this conception of faith comes from Alvin Plantinga (2000). He agrees that faith is the knowledge of a divine kind. However, he expands this assertion and claims that this knowledge is closely related to the belief system. Believing in something based on faith follows criteria that, when put together, are enough to establish a solid basis and justification for that belief (Plantinga, 2000, pp. 250-258). Therefore, if the conditions of believing in something based on faith are met, that belief becomes strong and justified. However, if that belief is strong and justified, Plantinga (2000, p. 258) asserts, then that belief becomes something that you know. Thus, for the religious person the existence of God is not a mere belief, but a certainty. Consequentially, belief becomes the knowledge of what you strongly believe and have a strong justification for it.

As mentioned previously, faith without belief cannot become knowledge. However, belief is often regarded as faith instead of just a step toward faith. Accordingly, faith can be a different kind of belief, for example, a belief that God exists, a belief that He is kind-hearted, or that He has a plan of salvation. Swinburne (2005) writes that faith cannot exist without this belief. Having faith already presupposes the belief in something called God. Thus, faith becomes the belief in the existence of God. Additionally, this account of faith is supported by the fact that most Christian branches and the major denominations accept and implement the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is recited during the Catholic Mass's Liturgy and is central to the Orthodox Divine Liturgy. It's also used in Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Eastern Catholic worship while acknowledged by many Protestant denominations as a significant declaration of faith. Nicene Creed, originally in Greek, begins with the word "Πιστεύω εἰς". This word has two meanings in Greek: "I believe in" and "I have faith in". Thus, according to Swinburne (2005), this means that to have faith in God simply means to hold a belief or to believe in the existence of God. Ultimately, this means that the person with faith believes there is a God.

Considering faith as a form of knowledge or a firmly held belief, it can be puzzling to entertain the possibility of faith being a virtue. Let us quickly examine what virtue is for those favoring this

disposition. Chappel (1996) argues that virtue is the quality of character that embodies or encourages a positive response to one or more fundamental goods. Chappel recognizes four traits of basic (essential) good<sup>5</sup>. He identifies these traits in truth and practical hope, thus recognizing them as basic goods (pp. 30-31). Further, Chappel argues that faith encourages both truth and practical hope. Therefore, for Chappel (1996), faith is a virtue primarily because it fosters truth and practical hope, both fundamental goods.

A different take on virtue and faith together has been developed by Audi Robbert (2014). He goes a bit further than Chappel and distinguishes faithfulness, having a religious faith<sup>6</sup>, and being a person of Christian faith. He states that faithfulness is a virtue of character, having a religious faith is an attitudinal virtue, and between them lies the personality virtue attained by the person of faith (p. 342). Faithfulness is a virtue of the character since it is inherently good. Both Chappel (1996) and Audi (2014) agree on this. Conversely, religious faith is an attitudinal virtue with a distinct focus toward a singular goal. However, between faithfulness and having a religious faith lies the person of Christian faith. Audi (2014) argues that the person of Christian faith exhibits a third kind of virtue, the so-called personality virtue (pp. 342-343). Two key differences are highlighted between the virtue of character and the virtue of personality<sup>7</sup>. Ultimately, Audi understands faith as three distinct types of virtues: the virtue of character, the virtue of personality, and attitudinal virtue. Faithfulness displays a virtue of character; having a religious faith is part of the attitudinal virtues; and finally, the person of Christian faith is between both of them as a personality virtue.

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<sup>5</sup> 1) Basic goods are crucial for guiding the purpose and direction of rationality; 2) This rationality then contributes by shedding light on the nature of these goods; 3) These basic goods possess qualities of being either evident or self-evident; and 4) They are indivisible and distinct by nature, pursued only for their inherent value of being good (pp. 29-30).

<sup>6</sup> Audi (2014) under “having a religious faith” understands a faith that is commonly referred to with the phrase “faith in” (p. 327). [I.e., faith in the Government]

<sup>7</sup> The contrast between character and personality is highlighted by two key aspects. Firstly, possessing good character involves having the most moral virtues and minimal moral vices, while personality can vary widely even among individuals with good character. Secondly, good character is about meeting certain standards, while personality covers a wider range of individual differences (Audi, 2014, p.344).

The exploration of faith across various scholarly perspectives provides a multifaceted understanding of this complex concept. The relationship between faith and belief, as elucidated by Richard Swinburne (2005), reveals faith's foundation in a deeply held, subjective, and passionate conviction, particularly in the existence of God. The discussion on faith as a virtue, as presented by thinkers such as Robert Audi (2014) and Thomas Chappel (1996), further adds to the debate by highlighting different dimensions of virtue associated with the individual and his personality. Furthermore, the connection between knowledge and faith, often perceived as incompatible, finds a nuanced resolution through Plantinga's (2004) synthesis. Thus, a common thread emerges concerning faith and the innermost human, individual passions in examining various conceptions of faith.

### **3.2 Kierkegaard's conception of faith**

During his lifetime, Kierkegaard (1813-1855) personally witnessed the disruption of the harmony between the religion and its members. His contemporaries, who were influenced by the recent scientific and political developments, were doubting and criticizing the idea of faith. People were encouraged to examine their individual thoughts and behaviors. People were reducing faith from something complex, intricate, and nuanced to a simplistic, shallow, and trivial concept. As a consequence, the influence of religious beliefs, practices, and doctrines significantly declined. However, as someone who was raised in a Christian family, Kierkegaard opposed this current of reexamining, doubting and criticizing faith. He recognized faith as something greater than any other idea, as a rarely reachable, lifelong (Kierkegaard 2005/1843, p. 3-6). Throughout his life he writes about faith, anxiety and the self. However, Soren Kierkegaard (2005/1843) dedicates a book in itself specifically on faith and its difficulties. He, in his famous book, "Fear and Trembling", develops and explains his understandings of faith. In it, he showcases the difficulties, intricacies and complexities on faith through the biblical story of Abraham and his son Isaac. "*Fear and Trembling*" is a dialectical lyric written under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio. He divides the book in two parts, with nine chapters. It begins with a preface written by the author, where he criticizes the decline of religious beliefs, doctrines and practices in his society. Following that, he

provides the reader with four different alternate stories where Abraham and Isaac act differently. The next chapter is named *Speech in Praise of Abraham* where he sets the scene and introduces the reader to the importance and greatness of Abraham and his story. What follows next is the beginning of the main part, *Problemata*, where he explains, defends and further develops his concept of faith.

The intricacies, contradictions and difficulties of faith, Kierkegaard explores and showcases in the central part, *The Problemata*. He further divides this part in four sections. The first section is an introduction where the author is justifying the following three sections. In these sections, *Problemata I, II, and III*, Kierkegaard tries to answer three vital questions. In the first *Problemata*, the central question is whether Abraham, traditionally considered the father of faith, suspended ethical norms in favor of his individuality. The second *Problemata* revolves around the question of whether Abraham had a duty higher than the ethical duty that applies to everyone. Finally, the third *Problemata* explores the concealment of that duty and questions whether it is ethical for one to conceal a duty higher than the ethical one.

During this chapter, I will explain and analyze the three inquiries, emphasizing the contradictions and the difficulties. I will then illuminate the unique characteristics of his conception of faith, focusing on its absurdity, challenges, and subjectivity.

### **The central part**

In the central part, Kierkegaard provides the reader with a vital information of the complexities and paradoxes faced through faith. Moreover, he explains and defends faith as the most private and subjective endeavor. This part, called *Problemata*, is further divided further into three *Problematas*, which coincide with three questions. The first question concerns whether there is something beyond the universally accepted beliefs, traditions and social norms. The second question raises a dilemma of whether there is an unconditional responsibility to God. Finally, the third question asks whether it is ethical to conceal one's subjective thoughts. Answering these questions is crucial for understanding Kierkegaard's conception and idea of faith.

The first question begins with a defense of the ethical. Kierkegaard (2005/1843) holds that the ethical is universal, and as the universal, the ethical applies to everyone at every moment (p. 62). The ethical should be understood as the traditions, beliefs and social norms that are generally accepted by the society. Thus, when Kierkegaard claims that the ethical is the universal, he states that these social norms, traditions, and beliefs are universal facts. Consequently, he believes that the purpose of each individual is to preserve himself in these universal facts (p. 62). However, the individual sometimes has a desire to act against the universal facts, but sometimes he goes further and he acts. In the former the individual is in temptation, and in the later the individual sins. Nevertheless, according to Kierkegaard, faith is the contradiction where the individual transgresses, acts against these universal facts, however, he does not sin. He writes: "Faith is just this paradox, that the single individual as the particular is higher than the universal, though in such a way, be it noted, that the movement is repeated, that is, that, having been in the universal, the single individual sets himself apart as the particular above the universal." (Kierkegaard, 2005/1843, p. 63). In this passage, the assertion is that faith is giving the individual the power to be above the universally accepted beliefs, norms and traditions. Thus, it is not only acting against the universal facts, but its beyond and above them.

The second *Problemata* is concerned with the question of whether there is an unconditional obligation towards God. Kierkegaard begins by creating a connection between the ethical obligations, the universal, and the divine. The divine obligation is the obligation towards God. As discussed earlier, an ethical obligation is for the individual to express himself according to the universal facts. Kierkegaard acknowledges the divine as synonymous with universal facts, suggesting that the individual, in response, shares the same obligation towards the divine as they do towards the universal facts. Following this, Kierkegaard is distinguishing between the interiority and the exteriority of the individual. The subjective thoughts such as mood and feelings are what he classifies as an interiority (p. 81). Opposite to interiority is the exteriority which is recognized as the outward expression of the universal beliefs, traditions, and social norms (p. 81). He proclaims that the obligation of every individual is to express his interiority into the exteriority

(p. 81). Thus, the universal and divine obligation of everyone is to express his inner subjective emotions into the universally accepted beliefs and facts. Hence, it also follows that expressing one inner emotion in the external universal facts is what every individual is obligated to do. Acting against this obligation is sinning. Thus, beliefs, traditions, and social norms are placed above and are more important than any inner subjective thoughts of the individual. However, faith is a contradiction where the individual subjective thoughts are above and more important than the universal facts (p. 81-82). Furthermore, it is also a contradiction where instead of the universal facts influencing the individual, the individual is influencing the universal beliefs, norms, and traditions (p. 81-82). All this means that the individual is not determining his relation to God through the fulfillment of his divine and universal obligations. Instead, he is determining his relation to the divine through his internal thoughts. Which consequentially means that the individual, relates as a complete and subjective individual to God. Hence, Kierkegaard claims that faith can only exist if it is accepted that there is an unconditional duty to God which is higher than the duty to God. Ultimately, Kierkegaard argues that the absolute duty to God exists, and that duty is to love God (p. 82-83). Moreover, as soon as the individual has a desire to express this obligation outside of himself, he is in a temptation. However, if he acts upon that desire and expresses his inner absolute obligation to God in the universally accepted facts, he sins. Thus, faith is a contradiction where the single individual has an absolute duty to God through which he stands in an absolute relation to God. However, the individual is only permitted to keep his obligation and relation in his himself.

The third and final concern of Kierkegaard is whether this interior obligation to God can be ethically and universally justifiable. Kierkegaard begins by proclaiming that every individual is regarded as a being with his own inner mind and consciousness, and thus everyone begins in concealment (p. 98). For him 'concealment' is when the individual does not share his interiority in the external world. Opposite of that is 'disclosure' where the individual is expressing his inner self in the universal facts. Therefore, the individual's responsibility is to disclose his interiority in the exteriority. In return, if the individual wants to keep his interiority he is in temptation, and

whenever the individual keeps his interiority and refuses to disclose, he sins. However, the individual who received a divine obligation, received it in a divine language that no human can understand (Kierkegaard, 2005/1843). Thus, he cannot disclose himself to anybody because nobody can understand him. Finally, faith is portrayed again as the contradiction where the individual stands in a relation with God which is greater and more important than his relation to the universal facts.

### **Temptation**

Throughout these three chapters, *Problemata I, II* and *III*, faith is accompanied with temptations. Each *Problemata* explains different challenges faced by faith. In the first *Problemata*, the individual who has faith is being tempted by the universal facts to conform in it (Kierkegaard 2005/1843). However, he does not conform with the universal, and yet he is not sinning either. The individual is not sinning because his purpose is higher than the universally accepted beliefs, traditions and norms. Following that, in the second *Problemata* the temptation happens between the individual and his duty to obey the universal facts. However, whenever the individual acquires an absolute obligation to God, his duty becomes the obligation to love God. Thus, his duty to the divine which is represented by the universally accepted beliefs, traditions and norms is in between him and his duty to love God. This means that faith sometimes requires a sacrifice of the ethical duty in order to fulfill the absolute duty to God. Thereafter, the individual with faith is tempted by the obligations towards the universally accepted beliefs, traditions and social norms. During the third *Problemata* the universal facts are tempting the individual to disclose his inner motives and subjective thoughts. However, faith requires the individual to stay in concealment, and to not externalize his inner thoughts. Ultimately, faith is inseparable from temptations, meaning, where is faith there are temptation. Moreover, these temptations are conformity and obedience towards the universal facts.

### **Absurdity**

Besides requiring temptation, Kierkegaard's (2005/1843) faith requires believing in the absurd as well. Whoever believes in the absurd, achieves faith. Kierkegaard names the individual who has

believes in the absurd and achieves faith a 'knight of faith'. There are two steps in becoming a knight of faith. First and foremost, the individual must have an intense desire (p.46). He needs to become aware that the desire he has is unattainable in reality and not back down from it (p. 47). Instead, the individual assures himself that the desire is fundamental for him (p. 47). Following that, this desire which is the essence of his life takes a religious character becoming an endless desire of the impossible (p. 49-50). Consequently, the desire is lost in the real world but is endlessly gained in the spiritual world (p. 49). Having gained the desire in the spiritual world, he does not pay attention to it in the real world anymore (p. 50). Hence, he endlessly gives up the desire in the real world, becoming a knight of infinite resignation (p. 50). However, in doing so, he believes in the strength of the absurd, that for God everything is possible (p. 53). This believe in the absurd is the bridge between the first movement and the movement of faith. Faith comes at last and is the spiritual receiving of the impossible desire (p. 53). Kierkegaard on this proclaims that "Through faith I don't renounce anything, on the contrary in faith I receive everything..." (p. 55). Thus, faith becomes the possibility of the impossible desire through God's omnipotence. Kierkegaard's concept of faith involves embracing the absurd through two movements: giving up the desire in the real world, and spiritually receiving the impossible desire through belief in God's omnipotence. Through faith, Kierkegaard emphasizes the individual do not renouncing anything but, instead, receives everything.

### **Emotion**

Throughout the three *Problemata*, Kierkegaard (2005/1843) is supporting the notion that faith is the innermost human emotion and could only exist as a subjective endeavor, impossible to articulate it. Firstly, at the end of the *Problemata I*, Kierkegaard claims that "faith is a passion" (p. 79). In the footnote of the same page, he further explains that passion makes people equal (p. 79). It makes them equal, as he adds, because every individual could have felt and thought the same thing as anyone else (p. 79). Kierkegaard here emphasizes the universality of passion. At the beginning of the next chapter, *Problemata II*, Kierkegaard is directly confirming that he recognizes faith in the company of internal emotions such as: "feeling, mood, idiosyncrasy, hysteria and the

rest” (p. 82). Furthermore, he asserts that faith is the contradiction where the internal emotion is higher than the exteriority (p. 81). In the third and final *Problemata*, Kierkegaard discusses the limits of faith. According to Kierkegaard, faith encounters its limit in the external world, and any attempt to articulate it within this realm is sinful (p. 145). Throughout the three chapters, faith transforms into an internalized emotion that remains uncommunicable beyond the bounds of an individual's subjectivity. Kierkegaard gives faith the property of an emotion, plants it in each individual and locks it from any external influences.

In conclusion, for Kierkegaard (2005/1843), faith is not merely a set of doctrines or rituals but a profound and challenging commitment. Moreover, this commitment is in the realm of the person's inner subjectivity. Kierkegaard's aim was to reassert the depth and complexity of faith. Through his work "*Fear and Trembling*," he presents faith as an absurd and contradictory endeavor with constant temptations. Faith, moreover, involves a personal and direct connection with the divine, a relationship that goes beyond the universal facts and it cannot be articulated in it. Kierkegaard's faith emphasizes the individual's unique relationship with God, stressing that this connection remains coherent when one refrains from conforming outwardly to universally accepted ethical norms. Ultimately, for Kierkegaard, faith is the contradiction that requires an individual to believe in the absurd, navigating the tensions between the divine and the ethical, the personal and the universal.

### **3.3 Concluding remarks**

It is evident that passion plays a vital and recurring role across various scholarly perspectives, including those of Richard Swinburne (2005), Robert Audi (2014), Thomas Chappel (1996), Alvin Plantinga (2004), and, notably, Soren Kierkegaard (2005/1843). Whether understood as a deeply held conviction, a virtue intertwined with fundamental goods, or a profound and challenging commitment, faith consistently reveals itself as intimately connected to the innermost passions of the individual. Swinburne's exploration of faith underscores its foundation in a passionate conviction, particularly in the existence of God. Audi and Chappel contribute to the discourse by highlighting faith as a virtue, associating it with various dimensions of individual personality, and

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emphasizing its positive relationship with fundamental goods, such as truth and practical hope. Plantinga, in reconciling knowledge and faith, implies a passionate commitment in his modern interpretation. Kierkegaard, situated in a context of skepticism and reductionism towards religious beliefs, places an exceptional emphasis on passion in faith. His conceptualization of faith as a paradoxical and contradictory endeavor demands a personal and direct connection with the divine that surpasses societal norms and traditions. Kierkegaard, through the absurdity, temptations and the emotional endeavor vividly illustrates the complexities and difficulties of faith

#### 4. The Importance of Kierkegaard's Faith

Kierkegaard's (2005/1843) conception of faith is unique and profound, however, there is an underlying importance of it. First of all, Kierkegaard's formulation of faith was a response to the religious decline in 19th-century Denmark, thus, the relevance extends to contemporary Europe (Johnson and Grim, 2013; Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Burkimsher, 2014; Tromp et al, 2021). Both then and now there is an increasing level of secularization at an individual level (Johnson & Grim, 2013, p. 87). This development has been criticized and reflected upon by Kierkegaard (2005/1843) in the *Preface* and in the *Epilogue* of "Fear and Trembling" (pp. 3-7; pp. 149-152). Thus, his book, before everything, is a reaction to his Danish contemporaries. His reaction centers on the individual's behaviors and thoughts towards faith exhibited by Abraham and the knight of faith. This is strikingly similar with the depiction of secularization and the theories of Shinner (1967) and Dobbelaere (2002). Shinner argued that the decline of religious beliefs, doctrines, and practices would result in a world without religion (p. 209). Conversely, Dobbelaere (2002) claims that the decrease of religious thoughts and behaviors in individuals leads towards a decreased harmony between the religion and its members (p. 25). Thus, Shinner and Dobbelaere both agree that secularization at individual level leads towards a complete demise of the religion.

However, a world devoid of religion would not be a very pleasant place for humans. Frankl (2000) argues that without religion, the purpose and meaning of life are endangered. He arrives at this conclusion by recognizing the desire for meaning as a primordial and essential human characteristic. Nevertheless, this constant quest for meaning generates an existential vacuum characterized by purposelessness, meaninglessness, and emptiness (2000, p. 139). As a response to this vacuum, humans have invented symbols. These symbols are used for those aspects of life that are difficult to explain in a meaningful way (p. 148-150). Religion, in essence, functions as the organized system of these symbols (p. 149). Thus, without religion, without the system of

symbols, individuals will be deprived of the meaning that they provide. This deprivation, in turn, will revive and intensify the search for meaning, the existential vacuum.

As the culmination of secularization at the individual level leads to complete de-religionization, Kierkegaard's conception of faith emerges as a distinctive solution. Despite its apparent anachronism, Kierkegaard's concept offers an adequate response to individual secularization, advocating for the preservation and nurturing of authentic human characteristics. Therefore, it can be argued that this conception of faith does not challenge societal and institutional secularizations. Instead, it addresses individual secularization, enriching personal beliefs, morals, and thoughts while fostering the most genuine human characteristics.

### **Nurturing the authentic human characteristic**

Kierkegaard immediately sets the scene in the *Preface*, where he asserts that passion has been suppressed in the name of science (p. 6). At a later stage, while explaining the process of achieving faith, he declares that passion is the essential requirement in faith (p. 47). This suggests that only through passion can the individual acquire faith. However, towards the end, Kierkegaard declares that faith requires passion and is the highest form of passion itself (p. 151). The reader is familiar with the authentic human characteristic, or as Kierkegaard (2005/1843) calls it, "The authentic human factor" (p. 149-150), since the beginning of the book. However, in the final chapter, the reader discovers the name of this "authentic human factor" (p. 149-150). Regarding faith as the primary characteristic most authentic to the human being strikes familiarity with Frankl's (2000) ideas. He claims that humans create and use religion because doing so is a fundamental characteristic of human beings (p. 148-149). For Frankl, religion is the system of symbols humans create and use to describe irrational meanings (p. 148-149). Explaining irrational meanings satisfies the most authentic human desire of all, the desire for meaning (p. 153). Thus, Frankl asserts that religion is the structure of symbols that aim at explaining rationally unexplainable concepts (p. 148-149). The desire to explain rationally unexplainable concepts is the inherent human desire for meaning (p. 153).

For Kierkegaard (2005/1843), faith enjoys similar attributes and can be recognized as a symbol explaining the irrational. This can be identified when Kierkegaard states that “[Abraham, the father of faith] believed on the strength of the absurd, for all human calculation had long since been suspended” (p. 39) and, “Faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off” (p. 61). The absurd, mentioned in the first passage, is the assumption that the divine cares about the smallest things (p. 36) and that for God, everything is possible (p. 52). In other words, faith is a rationally unexplainable emotion. The second passage is just confirming the first assertion that faith is beyond rationality. This irrationality, this unexplainable emotion, is the reason why Abraham is unable to communicate nor be understood by Sarah, Eleazar, and Isaac (p. 140-141). Explaining and externalizing the thoughts of the individual in the rational world would be a futile effort because they are irrational; they are beyond reason. They cannot be put in a rational sense. Moreover, this also applies to his internal divine obligation, which could not be externalized (p. 83). Kierkegaard writes, “As soon as the individual wants to express his absolute duty in the universal, becomes conscious of it in the latter, he knows he is in a state of temptation, and then, even if he otherwise resists the temptation, he does not come to fulfill that so-called absolute duty, and if he does not resist it he sins...” (p. 83). There is a clear and distinct border between the internal, irrational, passionate emotion and the external world of rational ideas and universal facts. Faith cannot and should not transgress this border, and passion, as an authentically human characteristic, should be kept solely within an individual’s thoughts.

### **Preserving the individual level**

Furthermore, Kierkegaard’s (2005/1843) faith cannot exist at the societal or institutional level. He argues that whenever the individual wants to externalize his interiority, he is tempted, and whenever he does, he is sinning (p. 83 & p. 140-141). Thus, faith can only be preserved as a highly personal, individual endeavor. The road of faith, as Kierkegaard claims, is solely a private and lonely road where the individual enjoys an intimate relation with the divine (p. 90; p. 142). Consequentially describing the father of faith, Abraham, as the one who cannot speak (p. 139).

Moreover, if he externalizes his faith with someone other than himself, he is no longer in the realms of faith (p. 84). In other words, whenever the individual speaks his inner thoughts, he immediately loses his faith. Kierkegaard gives importance and power to the individual's subjective thoughts and beliefs. This, in turn, strengthens faith and harmonizes the individual with their inner personal beliefs. The concept of faith, as mentioned above, opposes the theories of individual secularization as described by both Shinner (1967) and Dobbelaere (2002). They claim that decreasing religious thought, belief, and practices will also increase the dissonance between the believer and their religion (Shinner, pp. 209-211; Dobbelaere, p. 25). Ultimately, the dissonance increase will culminate with religion's complete disappearance (Shinner, 1967, pp. 209-210). However, Kierkegaard's conception of faith harmonizes the beliefs' thoughts and behaviors with the divine, thus maintaining the religion. Through increasing religious thoughts, beliefs, and practices, the individual can strengthen the harmony between himself and the divine, ensuring a religious tomorrow.

### **Difficulties of Faith**

Passion, emotion, absurdity, temptations, sins, contradictions, interiority-exteriority... Faith is difficult and complicated, and Kierkegaard (2005/1843) made sure we understood that. He plainly writes what he believes in: "But what no one has the right to do is let others suppose that faith is something inferior or that it is an easy matter, when in fact it is the greatest and the most difficult of all" (p. 59). This disappointment of his contemporaries and the way they treated faith was clear from the start. He argues that there is an emergence of new ideas, however, the old ones are discarded easily, like items on sale, "Not just in commerce but in the world of ideas too our age is putting on a veritable clearance sale" (p. 3). This rhetoric also reflected the end of the book as well. At the opening of the *Epilogue* Kierkegaard metaphorically argues that an artificial shortage of faith shall be created <sup>8</sup>(p. 149). Moreover, the main aim of the book was to showcase the

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<sup>8</sup> "Once when the spice market in Holland was a little slack, the merchants had some cargoes dumped at sea to force up the price. That was a pardonable, perhaps necessary, stratagem. Is it something similar we need in the world of spirit?" (p. 149).

extraordinary difficulty and complexity of faith, where doubting faith is a lifelong challenge. In the opening pages, Kierkegaard writes, "...Doubt not being a skill one could acquire in days and weeks..." (p. 5), and "For then faith was a task for a whole lifetime, not a skill thought to be acquired in either days or weeks" (p. 5). Kierkegaard, through these passages, specifically explained that both acknowledging faith and doubting faith is a challenge that is sufficient for the whole life. Furthermore, during the final remarks, he explains, "The task is always enough for a human lifetime" (p. 150). It is assessed that the individual shall be constantly challenged by faith.

#### **4.1 Summary**

In the context of increasing secularization, Kierkegaard's (2005/1843) conception of faith serves as a powerful reminder of its innate challenges and intricacies. His notion of faith primarily centers on cultivating the highest human passion and underscores the significance of experiencing it privately and individually. Keeping faith's individual and private aspect would help us secure and preserve the harmony of religious thoughts and behaviors. By preserving the harmony we would satisfy the most fundamental desire of humans, the desire for meaning. Frankl (2000) vividly illustrates the dangers and the shortcomings of a world devoid of religion. Moreover, his explanation of the human dependence on religion is depicted through our fundamental desire for meaning. Thus, this fundamental human desire aims to explain, rationally or irrationally, any concept perceived as meaningless. Through faith, we satisfy the desire for meaning, and furthermore, faith becomes the ultimate meaning. Frankl argued for keeping and nurturing faith because it is the highest passion, which is the most authentic human experience. The fundamental human desire for meaning clashes with the highest authentic human passion. Humans need this highest human passion to satisfy their inherent human desires. Therefore, we need faith to have the ultimate meaning, the meaning of the irrational. Thus, without the highest human passion of faith, we would not satisfy our inherently human desire for meaning

## Concluding Remarks

Concepts and ideas are rarely simple, and defining them has always been difficult. Thus, recognizing this difficulty, it has proven to be much more insightful and, at the same time, less complicated to analyze them. Analyzing such concepts is an enlightening endeavor from which many new ideas and perspectives can emerge. First of all, I initiated a historical examination of the usage of secularization, during which I focused on the historical understanding of the concept throughout Europe. Subsequently, I have discovered secularization to be both multilayered and multifaceted. In investigating the multifaceted nature of secularization, Shinner's (1967) conceptual analysis was proven to be an informative source. In his paper, Shinner discussed six different meanings of secularization. Immediately at the beginning of the analysis, at the first understanding of secularization, we have discovered an alarming world prediction. Shinner (1967) claims that if the decline of religious beliefs and doctrines continues, the culmination would be a total disappearance of the religion (p. 209). I have then focused on the multilayered theory by Dobbelaere (2002), which claims that secularization is a process with three levels. The societal, the institutional, the individual (p. 24-25). At the societal level, secularization is achieved by relegating religion to one subsystem among many (p. 24). At the institutional level, secularization aims to completely separate sacred elements, replacing them with secular entities such as the state (p. 25). However, at the individual level, secularization is centered around the members' relations, behaviors, and thoughts toward religion (p. 25). The individual level of secularization corresponds with Shinner's first understanding of secularization. This factor has also been somewhat acknowledged by Dobbelaere, thus making the connection between the culmination of the Shinner's understanding and his level of secularization. This connection provides a crucial insight into the world we may have in front of us, mainly the effects of individual secularization.

The decline of religion in Europe has been happening for a long time, and it does not show any signs of slowing down (Johnson and Grim, 2013; Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Burkimsher, 2014; Tromp et al., 2021). In the face of this unstoppable change, we are urged to look for any positive

outcome, if possible. However, the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, does not recognize any positive outcome in the religious demise. He claims that religion is a system of symbols that are fundamental for human beings (2000, p. 148-149). These symbols satisfy our inherent desire for meaning. Thus, through this system of symbols, religion is used as a rational explanation of the irrational. A world without these symbols would be left without any reasonable explanation for the meaning; therefore, the meaninglessness would increase. Eradicating the religion and its symbols would create a vacuum of meaning where meaninglessness would thrive. The human desire for meaning and the lack of it in the world would result in the constant enlargement of the existential vacuum. This existential vacuum manifests in hopelessness, emptiness, and meaninglessness (1959, p. 166). Thus, individual secularization has been shown to be damaging to human nature, with a direct effect on human behaviors and thoughts. Individual secularization can be sufficiently addressed through harmonizing the thoughts and behaviors of the members and their religious faith. This revelation initiated an examination and analysis of the concept of faith.

Faith is a complex concept; fully understanding it requires proper evaluation. However, the investigation done here reflects the purpose of this work. Focusing on a few aspects of faith efficiently narrowed the topic just enough to introduce the idea effectively. Understanding faith as a belief, knowledge, virtue, and the relation between reason and faith introduced us to widen our perspective of its understanding. Thus, exploring faith through such a diverse scholarly perspective gave us a nuanced insight into this intricate concept. Richard Swinburne (2005) illuminates faith's basis in deeply held, subjective conviction, particularly regarding God's existence. Robert Audi (2014) and Thomas Chappel (1996) contribute by depicting faith as a virtue intertwined with various dimensions of individual personality. On the other side, Alvin Plantinga's (2004) reconciles the seemingly conflicting realms of knowledge and faith. Across these understandings, a common thread emerges: faith is intimately connected to the innermost passions of the individual. The same conclusion has been drawn by Kierkegaard as well.

Kierkegaard (2005/1843) experienced a similar level of secularization in his lifetime, mainly in the individual sphere. His contemporary Danish society was devaluing faith and creating a shallow

idea from something profound (p. 3-5). Kierkegaard's Christian upbringing significantly influenced his opinions on that matter. In his book "Fear and Trembling", he challenged this view and restated the difficulties and complexities of faith. Through temptation, absurdities, and subjectiveness, his conception of faith has reached another level of understanding, a paradoxical understanding. His main narrative throughout the book was the difficulty of faith and its complexity. Faith, he wrote, is a task for a lifetime (p. 5). It should be accomplished at the end of life, maybe not even then (p. 3-5; p. 149-152). This notion was entertained from the introductory chapter up until the closing statements. However, despite the overwhelming differences between his society and our current European society, his conception of faith may prove to be very crucial. Kierkegaard's exploration of faith underscores its intimate connection with passion and the individual's innermost beliefs. Thus, as depicted by Kierkegaard, faith exists beyond rationality and is preserved as a deeply personal endeavor. Entertaining such religious thoughts and practices strengthens the individual's bond with the divine, thus harmonizing the individual thoughts and behaviors with the divine. This notion goes against theories of individual secularization, such as Shinnery's (1967) initial understanding and Dobbelaere's (2002) secularization on individual level.

Ultimately, the concepts of faith and secularization are intricate and multifaceted, resisting strict definition but providing an insightful analysis. Through historical exploration and scholarly perspectives, I tried to unveil the complexities of these concepts. Secularization, depicted as a multilayered phenomenon, encompasses societal, institutional, and individual levels, with potential consequences including the decline of religion. The individual level of secularization, in particular, poses a significant challenge, impacting human nature and behavior. Addressing individual secularization requires a harmonization of thoughts and behaviors with religious faith. On the other hand, faith emerges as a deeply personal and complex concept intertwined with subjective conviction, virtue, and passion. Scholars offer nuanced understandings of faith, highlighting its connection to the innermost passions of the individual. Kierkegaard's exploration of faith further emphasizes its profound challenges and complexities, resisting reduction to shallow interpretations and affirming its paradoxical nature. In today's European society, facing ongoing

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secularization, Kierkegaard's conception of faith becomes more important, advocating for its preservation as a deeply personal endeavor beyond rationality. Despite the differences between Kierkegaard's era and our own, his insights into faith's intimate connection with passion and belief offer valuable perspectives. Thus, amidst the complexities of faith and secularization, a deeper understanding emerges, illuminating the enduring significance of faith as a profound aspect of human experience

## Resumé

Táto bakalárska práca skúma dve myšlienky: myšlienku viery a sekularizácie. Začína historickým sekularizácie a predstavením empirických dát podporujúcich sekularizáciu spoločnosti. Ďalší rozbor sekularizácie odhaľuje jej mnohostrannú a viacvrstvovú povahu. Prvá kapitola práce je zameraná na komplexnú myšlienku sekularizácie. Analýza odhaľuje jej mnohostrannú povahu, čo je hlavným bodom tejto kapitoly. Mnohostranná povaha sekularizácie bola ďalej skúmaná skrz analýzy Shinnera (1967). Rozpoznáva šesť významov sekularizácie, z ktorých táto práca využíva päť. Každá z nich má bod, v ktorom kulminuje, avšak prvý význam vrcholí úplným zmiznutím náboženstva zo sveta. Následne práca skúma Dobbelaerovu (2002) teóriu viacerých vrstiev, zdôrazňujúcu komplexnú povahu sekularizácie. Na spoločenskej úrovni sekularizácia usiluje o zmiernenie náboženského vplyvu, zatiaľ čo na inštitucionálnej úrovni si kladie za cieľ prenášať a oddeliť štátne inštitúcie od náboženských. Na individuálnej úrovni sekularizácia stúpa, avšak s poklesom harmónie medzi myšlienkami a správaním veriacich a ich náboženstvom. Tento jav súvisí s prvým chápaním sekularizácie podľa Shinnera ako úpadku náboženstva. Stúpajúca sekularizácia, pre ktorú existuje dostatok empirických dôkazov, a vrchol individuálnej sekularizácie predpovedá svet bez náboženstva.

Podľa Shinnera a Dobbelaera nárast disharmónie medzi myšlienkami a správaním členov s náboženskými presvedčeniami, doktrínami a symbolmi zvyšuje individuálnu sekularizáciu. Táto sekularizácia jednotlivca zase smeruje k svetu bez náboženstva. V tomto pohľade sa obaja, Shinner a Dobbelaere, zhodujú. V tejto práci sa odhaľuje negatívny dopad náboženského úpadku prostredníctvom teórií Viktora Frankla. Frankl zdôrazňuje prirodzené ľudské túžby po zmysle života. Prehliadanie túžby po zmysle vedie k beznádeji, bezvýznamnosti a prázdnote, jednoducho k existenciálnemu vákuu. Toto existenciálne vákuum vedie k depresii, nudnosti a bezvýznamnosti. Potreba, využitie a tvorba náboženstva uspokojuje najhlbšie ľudské túžby.

Následne skúmam úlohu viery v rôznych vedeckých perspektívach, čerpajúc poznatky od Richarda Swinburnea, Roberta Audiho, Thomasa Chappela, Alvina Plantingu a najmä Sorena Kierkegaard. V týchto rôznorodých perspektívach viera sa javí ako zložito zviazaná s najvútornejšími vášňami jedincov, či už vnímaná ako hlboko zakorenené presvedčenie, cnostná vlastnosť alebo hlboká

oddanosť. Kierkegaard je jediný, ktorý situuje vieru do kontextu skepticizmu a výziev, zdôrazňujúc jej paradoxnú a hlboko osobnú povahu, výrazne ilustrujúc komplexnosť a emocionálne pnutie, ktoré je inherentné v ceste za vierou.

V kontexte sveta, ktorý je viac charakteristický sekularizáciou, Kierkegaardova predstava viery vyniká ako silná pripomienka hlbokých výziev a významu. Zameraný na rozvíjanie najvyššej ľudskej vášne, Kierkegaard zdôrazňuje podstatu prežívania viery v súkromí a individuálne, aby sa zachovala harmónia náboženských myšlienok a správania. Prostredníctvom viery jednotlivci nielenže uspokojia svoje základné túžby po význame, ale aj prekonávajú spoločenské normy a tradície, nachádzajúc konečný zmysel a autenticitu existencie. Franklove poznatky ďalej osvetľujú existenciálny význam viery, zdôrazňujúc jej úlohu pri napĺňaní prirodzenej ľudskej túžby po zmysle života. Takže, uprostred výziev, ktoré prináša sekularizácia, preskúmanie viery ako najvyššej ľudskej vášne ponúka pútavú cestu k uchopeniu komplexnosti ľudskej existencie

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