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Religious Diversity and Non-Religion Examined Within the Analytical Framework of a *European History of Religion*—Portugal as a Case Study

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Abstract

A large part of current sociological studies implicitly or explicitly assumes that religious diversity, non-religion, and secularisation are predominantly a question of European modernity. In a certain sense this assumption is correct, as these phenomena are growing in quantity, at least in Europe, and have become much more visible since the early 20th century. However, scholarly categories or models are always dependent on a particular discourse. If we refer to an interpretive–comparative method (Jonathan Z. Smith) and specifically to the epistemological model of a *European History of Religion* (Burkhard Gladigow), then we could assume that religious diversity and early forms of non-religion are almost a regular occurrence in European history, but hidden generally by a Christian discourse. The first part of the article, therefore, concerns the presentation of an analytical framework that can make religious diversity and early forms of non-religion more tangible historically and culturally. In the second part, Portuguese religious history should be re-examined based on this framework. Even if we cannot answer all questions on this complex topic, it may help us to better understand some contradictions in modern Portuguese religious history, such as the discrepancy between the population's consistently high self-declaration as Catholic and a relatively low level of religious practice.

Keywords: Portugal; religious history; diversity; cultural religion

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> What was after the universe? Nothing. But was there anything round the universe to show where it stopped before the nothing place began? It could not be a wall but there could be a thin thin line there all round everything. It was very big to think about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that. He tried to think what a big thought that must be but he could only think of God. (. . .) It made him very tired to think that way. It made him feel his head very big.
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> James Joyce *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

1. Religion "As We Understand It"

In recent years, sociological studies have accumulated evidence indicating that the non-religious population in Europe, unlike in other parts of the world, is steadily increasing. This notion is supported by several qualitative studies and, more notably, by various reputable quantitative research. For instance, the Pew Research Centre found that, in 2020, approximately 190 million people in Europe identified as religiously unaffiliated, marking an increase of about 37.2% compared to 2010 (Hackett et al. 2025). Around the same time, it was recognised that religious diversity is also on the rise, presenting a new challenge—especially for Western Europe—particularly concerning Islam (Koenig 2023).

Compared to the rest of the world, and in relation to its historical past, the religious landscape in Europe—meaning in terms of secularisation and religious diversity—is indeed an "exceptional case" (Davie 2006). There should be no doubt about these facts. However, what is questionable is the often-implied assumption that these phenomena are specific to modernity in Europe.

Depending on the discourse, the question can also be viewed in precisely the opposite way. In a certain sense, Europe was already an exceptional case in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, since, viewed from a particular European perspective, almost the entire rest of the world was "non-religious" at that time. In his still fascinating text "Religion, Religions, Religious", Jonathan Z. Smith pointed out that the first European explorers regarded the rest of the planet's inhabitants as godless or irreligious. For the first Portuguese and Spanish voyagers, there was no religion outside Europe, at least not "as we understand it" (Smith 1998, p. 269). Although the question may seem somewhat tedious, it is crucial to our understanding of how *we* perceive religion.

Even by European standards, atheism, non-religion or religious diversity were phenomena that were already widespread in classical antiquity. In Platon's *Nómoi*, we read that *asebeia* (which can be interpreted as a kind of atheism) was considered one of the worst crimes against the ancient Greek city-state and must be punished by death if the "impious person" continues "unteachable" (Platon 1990, pp. 341–45). If we consider that Platon intended to punish disbelief in the gods with death, then we can assume that this was not a simple offence committed by isolated individuals, but rather that it was viewed as a serious threat to the cohesion of society. Regardless of Platon's drastic punishments, and independent of clearly atheistic worldviews among some pre-Socratic philosophers, there are also many other good arguments that different forms of not accepting a providential personal God (such as atheism, pantheism, scepticism, agnosticism, or a general indifference regarding religion) are as old as humanity (Minois 1998). Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that, at least in ancient times, there was an extremely high density of different religions and religious cults on European soil. Ancient Rome was a meeting place for several "Oriental religions", of which Christianity was only one among many (Cumont 1929). Moreover, even the assumption (which, curiously enough, is even more widespread than one might assume) that everyone in the period of transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern period was a devout Catholic Christian or believer in God is hardly comprehensible from a historical perspective. Charles Taylor's assumption, for example, that it was only in modern times that it became necessary (or possible) to choose between several offers or that it was "virtually impossible not to believe in God" until about 1500 (Taylor 2007, p. 3), is probably more in line with the medieval power structure than with historical evidence. The lack of direct sources on the occasional occurrence of non-religion in the Middle Ages is not sufficient proof that it did not exist. Or rather, in the Middle Ages until the early 16th century, there is hardly any historical evidence, as far as Europe is concerned, that anyone described *themselves* as an atheist. However, there is evidence of several external accusations that *someone* is an atheist, as we can read in the *Decameron*, for example, where Guido Cavalcanti is described as an Epicurean. He is thus portrayed as someone only interested in proving that there is no God: "(. . .) he inclined somewhat to the opinion of the Epicureans, it was reported among the common folk that these his speculations consisted only in seeking if it might be discovered that God was not." (Boccaccio 1940, p. 310). This description by others ("it was reported among the common folk"), of course, is no proof that Guido Cavalcanti was a convinced atheist. However, it does make it very clear that, before 1500, it was virtually possible to not believe in God.

Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the Middle Ages were by no means purely an age of Christian credulity and that doubt and scepticism towards miracles, marvels or

the supernatural were very much present (Brewer 2016). When assessing religious life in the Middle Ages, it is essential to consider the respective power structures, which were typically dominated by religious experts (theologians, priests, etc.) and thus able to steer the discourse on belief and unbelief in specific directions. Although these terms cover many different things, unbelief and heresy in the Middle Ages were "not the irruption of deviance within an otherwise stable arena. It is the sign, rather, that authority is attempting to police that arena, place labels on what it rejects, and thus attempt to shape belief and action to a desired orthodoxy" (Arnold 2005, p. 206).

If one disregards the respective power structures of a particular historical context, the understanding of a specific local religious situation is almost automatically determined by or in line with the dominant discourse in this place and at this time, which tends to overlook or even to suppress the existence of alternatives or the religious creativity of the individual. When history is told from the margins, however, the picture that emerges of the centre is possibly different from what we are used to. By examining the multitude of little histories more closely, a more differentiated picture may emerge in which individual ideas or local customs are brought to the forefront. Microhistory is certainly not suitable for questioning major historical contexts, but it can provide a more nuanced image. Particularly in the religious history of Europe, it is essential to consider individual histories as well, so that the discursive dominance of Christian theology does not distort the overall picture. At least one thing should be indisputable: Despite all difficulties involved in establishing a universally valid definition of religion, we can safely assume that religion is not merely what religious experts define it to be. Furthermore, certain micro-stories can very well shed a different light on larger and even global contexts. If we can assume that religious life in a small medieval village in the province of Languedoc-Roussillon was not necessarily homogeneous (Ladurie 1975), why should that have been in the rest of Europe?

Concerning religion, the fundamental problem is that we are constantly talking about something for which there is no general semantic agreement, which can have a completely different meaning in a particular historical, cultural or even academic context, and which generally originates from the European cultural space and is therefore contextually characterised from the outset (Asad 1993). In this respect, it is always important to recognise the discursive framework in which religious issues are discussed. Religion was never an autonomous phenomenon, independent of time and place; discourse, power relations, practices, and heuristic interests always define it. This is probably the main reason for the misunderstandings or the differences in the interpretation of religious phenomena, for instance, in the early modern period and modernity. Whereas in earlier times the discursive supremacy was claimed by religious experts, in modern times the individual and their self-description have become the centre of scientific attention. In that regard, religious symbols or practices can take on a completely different meaning depending on their discursive use. As soon as individual self-description or self-determination comes to the fore, religious diversity becomes the norm. At this point, however, we find ourselves in another dilemma, as individual self-description allows for an infinite number of variants, which in many cases do not necessarily correspond to the conception of a religious expert. An individual Christian self-image, for example, does not necessarily have to conform to a theological self-image. In the end, we have no choice but to agree again with Jonathan Z. Smith and assume that the term *religion* is not an empirical category: "It is a second-order abstraction" (Smith 1988, p. 233). To a certain extent, religion is always just a heuristic tool for asking specific questions.

The lack of objective data in the study of religion also applies to sociological studies, as the questions are usually characterised by the sociologist's pre-understanding and the answers by the expectations of the cultural environment. If it were possible, for

instance, to retrospectively interview some of the inhabitants of Renaissance Florence using a contemporary sociological survey, we would probably have to revise many of our current views. One would certainly not conclude that there was no Catholic monopoly during this period. However, the survey might show that religious diversity or non-religious lifestyles at that time were maybe not as unusual as we assume today. At the very least, we would find ourselves in a completely different interpretative framework when we notice that, by this period at the latest, the strict duality of "true religion" and "heresy" is beginning to dissolve.

Nevertheless, this article is not intended to deny the validity of current sociological studies. On the contrary, it is assumed that the general trend of increasing secularisation, a further increase in non-religious people, and a steady growth in religious diversity in Europe is correct. However, the implicit assumption that these are typical phenomena of European modernity seems undifferentiated. It might be better to assume that Europe has never been characterised by a straightforward succession narrative from a deeply religious past to a secular present. It may be more correct to assume that religious scepticism and diversity have always been present in one form or another in European history. The main intention of the article is to provide a short reconstruction of a complex local religious history, which attempts to analyse and contextualise the prevailing discourse there in greater detail. Regardless of the quantitative increase, it can be expected that the specifically modern aspect of religious diversity or non-religion consists of the fact that it has ceased to be a "conflict" or a "problem". In Western modernity, religion has become a democratic phenomenon, and the distinction between the sacred and the profane is becoming increasingly blurred (Groys and Weibel 2011). Religious self-determination operates effectively in modern society even without the guidance of religious experts, and the relationship between the religious and the secular can hardly be understood solely in terms of a succession narrative.

Nowadays, one sometimes hears that, at least in Europe and in parts of the Western world, we live in a post-secular society. This concept is extremely complex and has often been misunderstood. The term "post-secular" was coined by Jürgen Habermas and sparked a lively debate. In his first mention of the term—in his 2001 speech on occasion of the awarding of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade—Habermas argues that religious beliefs or religions should have a right to exist or to be heard in a secular society. In this sense, Habermas is more concerned with making a demand than describing a real existing situation. A post-secular society therefore does not yet exist; rather, it is more a question of a process of transformation from a secular to a post-secular society (Habermas 2001). The question of whether we have already arrived at this post-secular society cannot and should not be answered in this article. Probably one of the major problems in the protracted debate on secularisation or on post-secular societies is that the terms are still unconsciously associated with the category of either/or. Even if it is not directly related to the topic of this article, it should not be ruled out that a modern individual, or a modern society, can be both secular *and* religious. In any case, it makes little sense to speak of a linear historical process leading from a religious to a secular and finally to a post-secular state of society.

To avoid an oversimplified succession narrative from a homogenous religious to a plural secular stage, the following argumentation will be based methodologically on the analytical framework of a *European History of Religion*, developed by the German scholar Burkhard Gladigow (Gladigow 2005; Grieser 2021). Regarding the model of *European History of Religion*, it becomes possible to demonstrate more clearly the historical existence of diverse religious phenomena and non-religious alternatives that are often overlooked in a historical setting predominantly shaped by a Christian discourse. In this sense, I am not attempting to provide a comprehensive quantitative or qualitative description of the non-

religious population or religious diversity in a well-defined geographical area of Europe. Instead, I am interested in using Gladigow's model to establish an alternative description that is not affected by a single predominant discourse. After a brief conceptual revision of Gladigow's model, I will apply it to the Portuguese history of religion. I use Portugal as a case study because I possess the necessary linguistic skills and because the country is particularly well-suited, as it is still considered one of the most religiously homogeneous countries in Europe today. In cultural terms, Portugal has indeed been strongly influenced by Catholicism, but this does not mean that there have never been, beneath a discourse that suggests homogeneity, any (or many) alternatives.

2. Worms and Cheese and Other "Concomitant Alternatives"

It is not very far from the Spanish university city of Salamanca to the Portuguese border. At the beginning of the 20th century, a well-developed rail network already existed in the Iberian Peninsula, so the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936) often travelled to Portugal. Besides the national literature, Unamuno was particularly interested in Portuguese religion and made some surprising observations. In 1908, he noted that it is often said that in Portugal no one is really interested in religion, which, in Unamuno's opinion, is an illusion. On the contrary, Unamuno discovered in Portugal a genuine religious naturalism with distinctly pagan and partly pantheistic characteristics:

> Es muy frecuente oir á los portugueses que es el suyo un pueblo irreligioso; que aquí, en Portugal, los problemas de religión no interesan de veras á nadie. Paréceme que, en esto, como en otras cosas, padecen una ilusión. (. . .) Por debajo de ella [la religión oficial] palpita y vive aún cierto naturalismo que tiene mucho de pagano y no poco de panteísta. (de Unamuno 1911, pp. 59–60).
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> [It is very often heard among the Portuguese that they are irreligious people; that here, in Portugal, the problems of religion are of no real interest to anyone. It seems to me that in this, as in other things, they suffer from an illusion. (...) Underneath it [the official religion] there still throbs and lives a certain naturalism which has much of the pagan and not a little of the pantheistic.]

For us, it is not a question of deciding whether Unamuno's observation is correct or not. Instead, it is more interesting to note that the discourse of the philosopher from Salamanca refers to a peasant religious tradition that differs from the main narrative of the dominant Portuguese Catholic Church. An official statistic, dating back to 1900, indicates that 99.87% of the Portuguese population is Catholic, which was seen as proof that Catholicism is the religion of the Portuguese kingdom in every respect (Vilaça 2006, p. 160). At that point, we have, in fact, three discourses that are in radical opposition: In the first decade of the 20th century, the Portuguese appear in a self-designation as irreligious ("It is very often heard among the Portuguese that they are irreligious people. . ."). In Unamuno's opinion, the Portuguese are followers of a kind of naturalistic religion with pagan and pantheistic elements. Moreover, finally, in a public discourse, the Portuguese are almost one hundred per cent Catholic. Since the philosopher did not distinguish between "true" and "false" religion, which is always a matter of *religious* judgment, the Church obviously could not agree with Unamuno and was forced to accuse him of heresy. Indeed, the Spanish philosopher was condemned in 1953 in a Bishop's Pastoral as "arch heretic and master of heresy", and his books were banned by the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*.

"Heresies" only exist if the description of a different religion or religious orientation is made from an internal theological perspective. In ancient Greece, an αἱρετικός was a follower of a particular religious or philosophical opinion. Etymologically, the word αἵρεσις means, in its literal and impartial sense, only "choice." The crucial question is

who exactly is talking about religion or "heresies", and in what sociocultural, political, or historical context. Nowadays, in a democratic environment, Unamuno's statements no longer cause the same discomfort as they did in the first half of the 20th century on the Iberian Peninsula. In our times, one might only conduct a quantitative sociological study to know whether the philosopher's statement is scientifically verifiable or not. However, Unamuno's statement was, as we shall see later on, probably not far from the truth. At least this is shown by the *Concílio Plenário Português*, which took place, just a few years after Unamuno's travels, in Lisbon between 24 November and 3 December 1926, and which, among other things, tried to find measures against frequently occurring superstition, sorcery, magic, and "other things of the same kind" (Leite 2000, pp. 418–19). At this point, it is again a question of who exactly is talking about religion. One can understand superstition, sorcery, or magic as a pagan heresy, or just as an individual religious or spiritual orientation; that is, a self-determined alternative that exists in parallel or in competition with the Catholic monopoly.

The reference to Unamuno now brings us to the theoretical core problem of our investigation. Unamuno travels through a country that is officially monolithically Catholic, but he notices that beneath the official view lies considerable diversity. The observations of the Spanish philosopher highlight a contradiction that, as already indicated above, we seek to resolve with Burkhard Gladigow's analytical framework for a *European History of Religion*. Conceived in the 1990s, this model precisely considers the broad historical spectrum of religious orientations, or the historical diversity of "interpretive offers" in Europe. Explained in a very abbreviated form, the main point of the *European History of Religion* is to emphasise the hitherto underestimated and very complex historical European diversity of cultural systems that can produce or provide meaning. When religion is considered within a complex cultural system and examined in terms of its interpretive competence, it automatically competes with other interpretive systems. Nevertheless, a religious interpretive system differs from other interpretive systems insofar as it has a normative character, which must be recognised as authentic by the "receivers".

Regarding its capacity to produce meaning, European Catholicism has always been—at least in theory—one option among several, such as Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Arianism, or Catharism. Even though these systems of meaning had strict geographical or social boundaries and were inaccessible to most of the population, their factual existence and the possibility of choice cannot be denied. In fact, one could go even further and, like Friedrich Schleiermacher, claim that there are as many religions as there are human experiences (Gladigow 2005, p. 155). Nevertheless, these individual experiences are then, as we have already indicated above, no longer under the control of religious experts.

The model of *European History of Religion* is therefore not merely concerned with a simple description of historical religious diversity, such as the coexistence of Christianity, Judaism and Islam on the Iberian Peninsula, or the contact between European explorers and other religions overseas. Instead, it encompasses the entire spectrum of religious orientations throughout European history. This means not only describing "positive" or institutionally established religions, but also identifying coexisting informal, alternative or differently organised systems of interpretation or meaning (Ibid 2005, pp. 290–91). In considering the historical variety of different religious and other meaning systems, Gladigow argues that too little attention was paid to their factual existence and to what they have caused in social or individual terms. He is obviously not concerned with defining religion, but rather with the existence of different, non-institutional and even individual systems of meaning, with the possibilities of choosing between them, and with the question of how other cultural subsystems can take over meaning-making functions. Terminologically, he refers to "concomitant alternatives" (*mitlaufende Alternativen*) or "vertical transfer"

(*vertikaler Transfer*). One can speak of "concomitant alternatives" if there are other offers that can be identified unequivocally and generally as religious, which, however, may be perceived as marginal, sometimes hidden or suppressed. In addition to "concomitant alternatives" of any kind, "vertical transfers" can be understood as processes in which non-religious providers of meaning interfere with or take over functions, structures, and intentions of institutional religious systems. These "vertical transfers" can be found across different many cultural subsystems, but are particularly evident in literature, art, and science (Ibid., pp. 296–98; Grieser 2021, pp. 205–8).

From Gladigow's perspective, this intense pluralisation of alternatives and transfers can mainly be observed from the Renaissance onwards. It should therefore be added that, particularly in more recent times, medieval scholars have also presented analytical frameworks that clearly indicate that even the Middle Ages were much less religiously homogeneous than previously assumed. Drawing specifically on Pierre Bourdieu's field model, it was emphasised, for example, that the distinction between the private and public spheres should be considered more closely. This led to the realisation that individual interest in religion was already evident in the early Middle Ages. However, this seems to have escaped the attention of religious experts, or perhaps they were unable to influence it, as it took place mainly behind closed doors (Steckel 2019). The focus of these studies is therefore no longer limited to church history but also encompasses religious culture in the Middle Ages (Ames 2012).

In this context, it is worth noting that these "concomitant alternatives" or "vertical transfers" also necessitate individual religious self-empowerment. One could paraphrase Kant's famous definition of the Enlightenment and claim that an individual's choice regarding religious or non-religious beliefs is no different from man's release from his (self-) incurred tutelage. Especially from a historical perspective, one would have to ask how great the individual's independence was in past times when choosing between different meaning providers. However, there are several additional questions. To what extent did these "concomitant alternatives" or "vertical transfers" exist? How were these distributed (location), and to what extent (size/structure) can one even speak of a real market model in the past? More generally, how much individual self-determination was there in religious issues, or what can be said historically about individual creativity in religious matters? It is particularly the consideration of little histories of individuals and local customs on the margins that makes it possible to see the big picture in a more differentiated way. At least the poor Italian miller Domenico Scandella, called Menocchio, can be seen as an example of religious self-empowerment by reading a couple of good books and by developing, in 1584, his singular cosmogony: "I have said that, in my opinion, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and out of that bulk a mass formed—just as cheese is made out of milk—and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels." (Ginzburg 1992, p. 6).

As far as diversity and non-religion are concerned, European history cannot be comprehensively grasped based only on one grand narrative or discourse. Regarding Portugal's specific religious history, a more differentiated picture will emerge by considering "concomitant alternatives", "vertical transfers", or little histories. Or, as it was formulated by Carlo Ginzburg: "As far as the quantitative history of ideas is concerned, only knowledge of the historical and social variability of the person of the reader will really lay the foundations for a history of ideas that is also *qualitatively* different." (Ibid. 1992, p. xxii).

Of course, the principal aim is not to describe or redescribe the entire religious history of Portugal. Nevertheless, some historical points should be addressed to demonstrate that terms such as diversity or non-religion always have a cultural and historical relativity that hardly captures the tension between an officially controlled religion and the religious (or

secular) self-determination of a social group or an individual. The question arises again: Who exactly is discussing religion, and in what sociocultural or political context? With this in mind, we try to let ourselves be influenced as little as possible by official church history and focus our attention on the historical religious culture of the country.

Like any other scientific study, this one faces several methodological difficulties. First, let us note that we have deliberately chosen the term "diversity" rather than "plurality" or "pluralism". "Diversity" refers solely to the pure, in our case, analytical description of difference and variety itself. The terms "plurality" or "pluralism", on the other hand, describe a condition in which this diversity not only exists in a society, but is also recognised, more and less organised and treated equally. Historically speaking, this condition was rather exceptional until the early or mid-20th century. Given this, it is more appropriate to refer to "diversity" in our study.

There is also the question of source material. Broadly speaking, our approach is primarily philological. In addition to recognised scientific studies, we mainly refer to historical texts and some recent demographic surveys. However, this approach presents two significant difficulties. The first difficulty is that the further back we go in time, the scarcer the sources become. This historically deteriorating source situation is compounded by the fact that, prior to the 20th century, there were virtually no scientifically viable studies of religion in Portugal, aside from a few (but fascinating) (pre-)sociological texts. Another problem, for example, is that even in the Middle Ages, there was a relatively high proportion of enslaved people from Africa among the Portuguese population. Since no one seemed particularly interested at that time, there is no information available about their religious orientations. Moreover, although it is very shocking, under the circumstances at that time, enslaved people were not even counted as part of the population. The second difficulty is that the discourse of the Catholic Church predominantly dominated most sources prior to the late 19th century. If one were to follow this discourse—or, as we already said, the church history in general—uncritically, one would indeed conclude that there was no significant religious diversity in Portugal prior to modern times. Therefore, we must analyse the discourse of these sources as far as possible. Put simply, who speaks when, where and under what conditions. In general, we must say that we cannot have an unbiased view of history, and it seems reasonable to assume that history is always larger than its sources. If that is the case—and we must assume it is—we could logically conclude that historical religious diversity in Portugal may have also been much larger than presented here.

In addition, there is the problematic question of historical periodisation. This means, we must assume that even in Europe specific important historical incidents can take on completely different meanings in different places. Therefore, we refer mainly to historical incidents that were particularly significant for Portugal and, to a lesser extent, for the Iberian Peninsula. Key milestones include, for example, the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula (711), the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Portugal (1496), the establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition (1536), the Lisbon earthquake (1755), the Liberal Revolution (1820), the separation of Church and State (1911), the introduction of the Estado Novo (1933), the Carnation Revolution (1974) and the period of democratic consolidation (since the 1980s).

Finally, we expect that future studies will reveal a similar picture in other Roman Catholic countries, such as Spain or Italy. Some promising studies on this topic have already been presented. An excellent ethnographical study, for example, comes from Thomas Hauschild. In a study conducted in a small village in southern Italy, he showed how magical practices have always coexisted quite naturally within a Catholic community throughout history and are currently more alive than ever (Hauschild 2002). In general,

however, research into historical religious diversity in Europe still relies on a map with many blind spots.

3. Looking Beyond the Catholic Monopoly: Religious Alternatives in Portuguese History

History is always a collection of many different stories, which sometimes complement each other but often contradict one another. One of the most remarkable facts in Iberian religious history is the temporal disparity between the Muslim conquest of the Peninsula and the so-called Christian Reconquista. In April 711, the first Muslim army, led by Tariq ibn Ziyad, crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, fought the Visigoth Kingdom under Roderic, which was probably engaged in a civil war, and by 718, more than two-thirds of the Iberian Peninsula was finally under Muslim rule. The seven years of the Muslim conquest are in an unequal temporal relationship with the 770 years of the Christian Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula (722–1492). There may be several reasons for this temporal disparity. Still, it raises the crucial question about the ideological background of the expression Christian Reconquista, especially since the noun "*Re-conquista*" is accompanied by the adjective "Christian." This is not only historically questionable, but also politically or ideologically problematic. In this case, the prefix "*re*" implies that something that already existed in the past has been recaptured. However, with a time gap of 770 years, this is highly dubious.

Curiously, the term *Re-conquista* denotes more a nationalist-religious movement in the 1930s, rather than the gradual displacement of Islam over a period of almost eight centuries. The Spanish nationalists under General Francisco Franco declared their uprising (1936–1939) to be a Christian *Re-conquista* of Spain and a crusade against communism, freemasonry, and Judaism. His fascist supporters celebrated Franco as the *reconquistador* of a "pagan Spain". At the same time, the concept of a *restauração cristã* (Christian restoration) emerged in Portugal to combat the increasing dechristianisation and "paganization" of the population. In 1933, the *Acção Católica Portuguesa* (Portuguese Catholic Action) was inaugurated with the primary intention of the "re-conquista cristã da sociedade" (Christian reconquest of the society). Since the *Acção Católica* had explicitly concerned the *re-Christianisation* of individuals and the *re-Catholicisation* of institutions (Fontes 2008, p. 175), it might be assumed that in Portugal (and Spain), a noticeable process of secularisation (or de-Christianisation) occurred at the turn of the 19th century to the 20th.

As already indicated, from a historical point of view, the term *Re-conquista* is highly misleading, since it erroneously assumes that something lost was reconquered:

> Indeed, the very notion of re-conquest involves from a historiographical perspective a number of anachronisms and anomalies. The notion which subsequently became enshrined in Christian ideology, particularly as a concomitant of emerging ethnic differentiation among Christian groups that they, as successors of the Goths, were re-conquering al-Andalus, involves a cultural misapprehension: namely those who lost Spain and those who gained it later were identical in culture (Glick 1979, p. 44).

What is true for Spain is equally valid for Portugal (or Al-Andalus, which refers to the entire territory of the Iberian Peninsula ruled by Islam), whereby the Reconquista in the Portuguese territory ended as early as 1249, when the last places still under Muslim control in the south of the country were taken. However, the discrepancy regarding the term Reconquista lies in the historically based assumption that the area of present-day Portugal was only relatively weakly and inconsistently Christianised before Islamic domination: "the cultural and mental environment (. . .) before 1000AD" was marked by "incoherence, contrast and paradox", or more concretely by a pluralistic eclecticism (Mattoso 1992, p. 509), including

many alternatives to Catholic Christianity, such as superstitions, idolatry, or several "heresies" (namely Arianism and Priscillianism). Around 573, Martinho, bishop of Dume and later archbishop of Braga, wrote his treatise *De correctione rusticorum*, which describes the religious life of Northern Portugal that was still primarily characterised by pagan superstitions and by the worship of demons or of old Roman gods (Martinho de Braga 1997). About 150 years after Martinho's treatise, a considerable part of what is now Portugal was under Islamic rule, and it is highly implausible that by then the entire population had already been completely Christianised. On the contrary, a systematic Christianisation occurred apparently much later, only "after the end of the Middle Ages, and mainly after the Counter-Reformation" (Almeida 1974, p. 19).

In this sense, the rapid Islamic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula can be explained, at least in part, by the limited Christianization that had occurred up to that point. Despite the persistent existence of pagan remnants, more than two-thirds of the Iberian Peninsula was for a long time characterised by a relatively conflict-free—though not necessarily equal—coexistence of the three Abrahamic religions. During a significant part of the Islamic rule, Jews and Christians were considered *dhimmis*, or protected people, who "suffered civil and legal disabilities in comparison with Muslims, but they also enjoyed the security that inhered in formal juridical status" (Glick 1979, p. 169). Although there seem to have been hardly any proselytising attempts on the part of the Muslims, a growing number of indigenous people converted to Islam (*Muladí*) can be observed throughout the territory of Al-Andalus at least until the end of the 11th century. Although the assimilation process was highly complex, the *Muladí* population group was substantial in size. Its members underwent a process of change in religious and cultural terms, ultimately adopting a new identity. However, it must be assumed that these changes also involved continuity, resulting in the preservation of various cultural characteristics from pre-Islamic times. For example, the communities of *Muladí* were bilingual, which meant that this population group always existed on a social boundary between the Arabic-speaking upper class and the rest of the population, who continued to speak Romance dialects (Miteva 2018).

Regardless of whether it is difficult to say whether this conversation was more socio-cultural or religious in nature, we can share Carlos Almeida's assumption that systematic Christianisation, mainly in the rural areas, only began after the expulsion of Islam. Despite the different social status of the various Abrahamic religions, religious diversity was the norm on the Iberian Peninsula until the Middle Ages. It was only in 1492 that the Catholic Kings Fernando and Isabel ordered the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews and Muslims. In 1496, the Portuguese King Manuel I followed this order and attempted to achieve a religious homogenisation for the Portuguese territory. At least until this time, the three Abrahamic religions coexisted in a complex sociocultural relationship, which the concept of "entanglement" can explain. As described in detail by Maria Filomena Lopes de Barros, "interfaith contacts at various levels and in various dimensions" were an everyday reality in Portuguese medieval urban life before December 1496, when King Manuel I of Portugal signed the decree of the expulsion or conversion of Jews and Muslims. The interfaith life in medieval Portugal, however, can only be described incompletely or *ex negativo*, as there are practically no records from the Jewish or Muslim perspectives. The historical narrative of that period has been fundamentally marked by Christian discourse (Barros 2019, p. 108), and it should therefore come as no surprise that the possibility of choosing, which exists at least in theory, is not mentioned in it.

Although Portugal was *officially* Catholic by the end of the 15th century, that did not mean that the country automatically became a religiously homogeneous country after 1496, in which nothing else existed apart from the Catholic faith. In contrast to Spain, a certain degree of religious elasticity within the forced conversion of Jews can be observed

in Portugal prior to the introduction of the Inquisition. Anyone who freely agreed to convert—they were then called *New Christians*—would not be subjected, for a period of about twenty years, to any investigation into their religious beliefs and practices. With the obvious exception of the Lisbon massacre of 1506, there was little evidence, in the first decades of the 16th century, of open tensions between different social groups of the *Old Christians* population and Jewish converts. This means that *New Christians* were allowed to maintain their Jewish religious practices secretly (i.e., in the domestic private sphere) until the formal establishment of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1536. Until this time, *New Christians* had retained a distinct cultural and religious identity, separated from the rest of the population (Rowland 2010, pp. 177–78). Since the mid-16th century, the discourse on religious matters in the Iberian Peninsula had been dominated exclusively by the Inquisition, which sought to create an image of a uniform Catholicism that allowed no deviations from the established doctrine. In the following years, and under the coercion of the Inquisition, the Portuguese population became, at least nominally, Catholic.

However, particularly regarding the *New Christians*, the procedure of the Inquisition can also be viewed in a very ambivalent manner. On the one hand, given that the Inquisition focused its attention primarily on the *New Christians*, one of the most essential functions of this institution can be deduced: It aimed to prevent any possible return to Judaism. On the other hand, since the Inquisition was undoubtedly an instrument of oppression and exclusion, it also provoked a specific defiant reaction in the sense that several Portuguese *New Christians* retained crypto-Jewish customs or emigrated to Amsterdam or London to convert back to Judaism. Some *New Christians* even claimed that the Inquisition was a veritable "factory for producing Jews" (Ibid. p. 181; Saraiva 2001), which were both virtual (if accused on false bases) and real. One of the best-known examples of a former Jew becoming a devout Catholic and then returning to Judaism is Uriel da Costa. He came from a family of *New Christians*, studied canon law at the University of Coimbra and held the office of treasurer at a small church near Porto from 1609 to 1611. Confronted by the Inquisition, he took renewed interest in the Jewish faith of his ancestors and, in 1614, was forced to emigrate via Hamburg to Amsterdam. He converted back to Judaism, but at the same time became a critic of some Jewish practices and was consequently excommunicated by the Jewish community of Hamburg. In later years, Uriel da Costa became a sceptic of all institutional religions, viewing religions in general as a human invention. For him, an ideal religion rests on natural law, and his writings influenced the thinking of Spinoza, Lessing, and others (Faur 1992, pp. 110–41).

Strangely enough, the Inquisition's oppression and exclusion can also be understood as mechanisms of maintaining a certain degree of religious and cultural diversity within narrow borders that are difficult to describe historically. Since the official discourse of the time was dominated exclusively by the Christian Inquisition, and there are virtually no other documents, it is impossible to say with historical certainty to what extent crypto-Jewish customs were in fact maintained by the *New Christians*. Although it cannot be determined whether all accusations were based on a factual basis, Inquisition trials indicate that the persistence of a particular Jewish identity or crypto-Jewish customs among *New Christians* lasted, even if only in isolated cases, at least until the 18th century. Regardless of this, the Jewish-Polish mining engineer Samuel Schwarz, who worked in the mines of northern Portugal from 1915 onwards, discovered a relatively lively crypto-Jewish community, particularly in the small town of Belmonte. In 1925, his book *Os Cristãos Novos em Portugal no Século XX* (*The New Christians in Portugal in the 20th Century*) was published, which subsequently led to a public revival of Jewish traditions in the region around Belmonte.

Only in May 1773 was the distinction between *New Christians* and *Old Christians* cancelled by a law of Marquis of Pombal. At the same time, Marquis of Pombal's law prohibited further inquisitorial questioning and required that previous prosecutions be destroyed so that there would be no possibility of further discrimination. Although the eradication of Jewish identity was the main priority of the Portuguese Inquisition, the trials and documents of this institution show that other "concomitant alternatives" or "vertical transfers" were also present in an officially homogeneous Catholic context. For example, there is a circular from the Holy Office, dated 5 January 1621 and published by *Inquisidor Geral* Fernão Martins de Mascarenhas, which prohibits the possession, reading and circulation of a little booklet (*hum libello infamatorio*) considered to be offensive to good morals and Christian piety. The circular mentions that the author is unknown and that reading or distributing it will result in punishment by excommunication (*Inquisição* (Fernando Martins de Mascarenhas) (1621)). Even more interesting are the so-called *Listas das pessoas que sahiram, condenaçoens que tiveram, & sentenças que se leram no Auto publico da Fè* in which the specific accusations were regularly made public and listed the "sentences that were read in the Public Act of Faith". The list, dated 16 June 1720 and published by *Inquisidor Geral* Nuno da Cunha, records several "deviations" from official doctrine, among others: Uttering heretical blasphemies, blasphemous words and presumption of having a pact with the devil, defence of Molinism (doctrine on Divine Providence named after the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina) and other "heresies" (especially Luther and Calvin), Judaism and witchcraft (*Inquisição* (Nuno de Cunha) (1720)). As far as the so-called "Protestant heresies" are concerned, the most prominent victim of the Portuguese Inquisition was Damião de Góis, considered the leading representative of Renaissance humanism in Portugal. He was a close friend of many other representatives of European humanism, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Sebastian Münster or Albrecht Dürer. After being under the protection of the king for a long time, he was sentenced to life imprisonment by the Inquisition in 1571 as a "Lutheran heretic" (Avelar 2019).

Although there are hardly any historical sources that would provide reliable information, we should also mention another aspect that speaks in favour of religious diversity alongside the Catholic monopoly in the Middle Ages, but which, for rather regrettable reasons, has never been given proper consideration. Some estimates suggest that around ten per cent of Lisbon's population in the 16th century were enslaved people from Africa. There is information about the price at which they were sold, how their health was checked, what work they had to do, and in what mass graves they were buried (Vogt 1973). However, there is no information—or at least none has been found so far—about their religion or religious beliefs. In this case, we can only speculate: Either they had no religion—at least not "as we understand it"—or simply no one was interested in what religion they did have. However, likely, they were not Catholic. We must emphasise that these statements are hypothetical, since we do not have any sources. Still, we must mention this fact because ten per cent of enslaved people also belonged to the population of Lisbon, even though they were not treated as such. Moreover, while this group was certainly not Catholic, it was either non-religious or belonged to another religion for which there are no reliable records.

Only a few concrete examples of "concomitant alternatives" or "vertical transfers" in Portuguese religious history can be given here. Examining the religious history from the early modern period onwards, one can observe clear signs of a certain religious indifference that begins in the final decades of the 17th century. On the one hand, several ideas circulated that questioned the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. On the other hand, it became clear that for many Portuguese, Catholicism was merely a social tradition or collective self-identification without any fundamental confessional conviction. Although the Inquisition strictly controlled society, the first signs of religious carelessness or an inevitable decline in

Christian normativity were indirectly evident. A religious movement, known as *Jacobeia* and established by the Franciscan monk Francisco da Anunciação, emerged in the early 18th century with the aim of spiritual renewal. The Jacobean endeavours targeted both the clergy and the general population, intending to enhance their spiritual lives, placing special emphasis on daily mental prayer, examination of conscience, and participation in the sacraments (Ribeiro 2016, pp. 122–37). This movement and similar phenomena are considered the first signs of growing religious indifference or even de-Christianization in Portugal from the end of the 17th century onwards (Ibid., pp. 138–45; Bethencourt 1984, p. 51).

When discussing Portuguese or, more generally, European religious history in the Middle Ages or early modern period, the image remains incomplete if one refers only to European soil. *European History of Religion* is, and has always been, a *Global History of Religion*, if only because "religion" is a genuinely European concept that has been used to describe non-European cultural systems (Hermann 2021). Concerning the voyages of discovery, it must be assumed that the Portuguese and Spanish navigators had already been confronted with growing religious and cultural diversity since the 15th century. In the first reports of the discoveries, it was usually said that the native Americans, or even the natives of the Canary Islands, "went naked, without shame, religion or knowledge of God" (*apud* Smith 1998, p. 269), although most indigenous populations, such as the inhabitants of the Canary Islands, had a relatively well-defined polytheistic religious system. From the perspective of Christian navigators, the category of "non-religion" formed globally the largest social group at that time. In this context, the question arises as to what precisely the self-designation "Christian" refers to in the case of the voyages of discovery. Since there was no general self-designation as European in the Middle Ages (Oschema 2013), it can be assumed that in many cases the self-designation as Christian did not necessarily refer to a firm belief, but instead to a collective cultural identification. Furthermore, Iberian navigators were confronted with completely different religious beliefs that were often much more intense than their own Christian faith. Ultimately, it can be assumed that conversion was, under certain circumstances, not as unusual as one might commonly assume.

The report by the Portuguese navigator Fernão Mendes Pinto illustrates how the discoveries led to a significant shift in European religious history. This means that Christian discourse outside geographical Europe was confronted with a completely new reality in which religious diversity became the norm in everyday life. Fernão Mendes Pinto left the port of Lisbon on 11 March 1537, and already in the Red Sea, he met a "Christian renegade" who had converted to Islam for love of a Greek Muslim girl. When asked if he "wanted to return to the faith and become Christian again (. . .) he replied in so harsh and senseless a manner, one would have thought he had been born and raised in that cursed religion." (Mendes Pinto 1989, p. 5).

Very revealing is Mendes Pinto's journey to the kingdom of *Calaminham*, which has been identified as Luang Prabang in Laos and is well known for its numerous Buddhist temples and monasteries. In his description of a festival called *Xipatilau*, Mendes Pinto apparently relocates a Hindu festival to a Buddhist region, noting that the procession resembles the Hindu *Jagannatha* festival, which is dedicated to Vishnu. Although he seems to mix up a Buddhist place and Hindu religious elements in his description, he showed a keen interest in the religious particularities of that place: "most of the time we just looked, listened, and asked questions about the laws, pagodas, and sacrificial rites we observed there (. . .)." (Ibid. p. 339). By describing "forty thousand priests representing the twenty-four religious sects of this empire" and 226 carriages, each one "four decks high, and some even five, with an equal number of wheels on each side", taking part in the procession (Ibid. p. 341), his observations oscillated between admiration and repugnance regarding the religious fervour of this procession, ending with a remarkable and ambiguous statement that bears witness to

the fact that religious life—even if not the "right" one—outside of Christianity can be much more intense and passionate: "(. . .) it is indeed an extremely pitiful and painful thing to see how much these poor wretches do to lose their souls and how little most of us Christians do to save ours." (Ibid. p. 347). Although Mendes Pinto's descriptions are always somewhat ambiguous, it sometimes seems as if non-European religions could well be an alternative. At the very least, they leave a strong impression: "many (. . .) pious deeds were performed, so much in keeping with Christian ethics that had they been done with faith and baptism in the name of Christ our Lord, without the intrusion of worldly matters, it seems to me that they would have been acceptable to him." (Ibid. p. 342). His entire journey can also be read as a long process of individual self-reflection, in which the existence of religious diversity was increasingly understood as the norm. Finally, it is worth noting that Mendes Pinto's descriptions often diverge from the official Christian discourse, and his book was therefore considered a subversive text for a long time. A systematic study of how encounters with non-European religions and customs affected the religiosity or mentality of the Portuguese (or European) population is still pending. To a certain extent, because of these encounters, Christian faith was relativised and strengthened at the same time.

From the mid-18th century, a new situation emerged in Portugal, which would seriously threaten the Catholic monopoly in the following years. A decisive turning point can be traced, at least symbolically, to two dates or to one person: 1 November 1755, the date of the Lisbon earthquake, and 3 September 1759, when the law expelling the Jesuits from Portugal was signed. Both dates are closely linked to the person of the Marquis of Pombal, who, as a representative of enlightened absolutism, tried to implement the ideals of the Enlightenment in Portugal. Under his guidance, the education system was nationalised in parallel with the reconstruction of Lisbon, and in this respect, education was no longer under the control of the Church. He considerably weakened the power of the Inquisition, and discrimination against *New Christians* was banned.

Additionally, the traditional privileges of the nobility, who were traditionally very close to the Church, were abolished. Although these changes were enforced with the greatest severity, they also signified an indirect preparation of the Liberal Revolution in Portugal in 1820, which subsequently led to a markedly ambivalent relationship between the State and the Church (Dix 2010, p. 10). The Inquisition was abolished in 1821; however, the Catholic Church was declared the official state religion the following year. In this respect, there was at least an official synchronisation between Portuguese identity and membership of the Catholic Church. Still, this synchronisation has been more normative than a real positive statement. At the latest, since the Liberal Revolution, anti-clerical tendencies and the first signs of a secularist ideology have become increasingly evident, and, almost unnoticed, a slow but steady process of religious liberalisation has begun.

In 1870, just 50 years after the abolition of the Inquisition, the Portuguese historian Joaquim Pedro de Oliveira Martins wrote a (pre-)sociological text in which he referred to an almost complete religious indifference among the Portuguese population:

> A religião, entre nós, é uma conveniência social para os políticos; uma superstição elegante para as mulheres, um velho hábito banal para o povo, para o maior número. Um sentimento consciente, imperativo, fecundo, isso é que ela já não é para ninguém [. . .] Oficialmente, nas estatísticas, há 4 milhões de cristãos em Portugal. Realmente, nos corações, há 4 milhões de indiferentes. (Martins 1948, pp. 23–24)
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> [Religion, among us, is a social convenience for politicians; an elegant superstition for women, an old banal habit for the people, for the majority. A conscious, imperative, fruitful feeling, that is what it is no longer for anyone [. . .] Officially,

according to statistics, there are 4 million Christians in Portugal. In reality, in their hearts, there are 4 million indifferent people.]

This statement is certainly not based on quantitative sociological research. However, several other contemporary witnesses shared this assessment (Dix 2010, pp. 11–12). Furthermore, Oliveria Martins' text is interesting for two other reasons. In theory, Oliveira Martins anticipated one of Durkheim's fundamental ideas when he claimed that religion is an essential social connexion that holds society together. Furthermore, Oliveira Martins called for the separation of Church and State to stimulate the religious dynamism of the population. The separation of Church and State was then completed in 1911, making Portugal the second country, after France (1905), to implement this separation. This separation was brought about by increased anti-clericalism during the First Republic, and the Republicans hoped that this would weaken the power of the Catholic Church. Curiously, this hope stood in striking contradiction to Oliveira Martins' considerations and ultimately had the opposite effect.

Finally, it is worth noting that by the end of the 19th century, the first systematic anthropological studies were conducted in Portugal, revealing a multitude of pagan remnants in folkloric traditions. A pioneering work in this regard was carried out by José Leite Vascocellos, who published an extensive collection of these folkloric traditions in 1882. Pointing out that these traditions are part of the *crença viva do povo* (living faith of the people), Vasconcellos referred to a wide variety of phenomena, such as sirens, enchanted Muslim women, living oxen in front of the altar, sorceresses, and supernatural beings in general, including werewolves or *olharapos* (cyclopes) (de Vasconcellos 1882). Effectively, these are religious remnants that were not always controlled by official discourse. Regarding the *crença viva do povo*, the control by religious experts is, of course, a highly complex matter. It cannot be too strict, but it must not be too lax either. Although the term *religião popular* (peasant religion) is controversial today and has sometimes been replaced by *piedade popular* (peasant piety), it should be emphasised that remnants of non-Christian faiths were still visible at least until the end of the 20th century (J. P. Cabral 1989). And one can assume that they are still very much alive today, primarily in rural areas. The proposal to replace the term "peasant religion" with "peasant piety" makes sense insofar as this religious phenomenon occurs collectively (or individually) but is not, or only to a limited extent, organised collectively. It is a kind of alternative accompaniment to official Catholicism and fulfils functions that the latter cannot fulfil itself. Therefore, this type of "peasant piety" must be tolerated by the Church within certain limits, as a ban would ultimately only harm the Church itself.

4. Non-Religion and Religious Self-Determination in Modern Portugal

In 1896, the great Portuguese novelist Eça de Queiroz (1845–1900) published a remarkable text in memory of his friend Antero de Quental (1842–1891) and their time as students together in Coimbra in the early 1860s. The text is entitled *Um Génio que era um Santo* (*A Genius who was a Saint*). It is a unique testimony of the psychological impact that a relatively sudden modernisation process can have on religious beliefs. Eça de Queiroz links the construction of a modern railway system with major intellectual upheavals in the student milieu. The new railways brought "torrents of new things, ideas, systems, aesthetics, forms, feelings, humanitarian interests", including very different thinkers such as Giambattista Vico, Jules Michelet, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Heinrich Heine, or Charles Darwin. The young students became familiar with the Vedas, the Mahabharata, the Zend-Avesta, the Edda, the Nibelungenlied, and, finally, what Queiroz described as something fascinating and completely new—the Bible. The existence of God was questioned by the young students at night, and as they felt imprisoned in a "theocratic oppression" at an

"ultra-conservative and ultra-Catholic university", they tended towards atheism "out of pure rebellion". (de Queiroz 1969, pp. 254–55).

This atmosphere of intellectual agitation not only led to a new individual self-determination regarding religion but also to existential doubts that could no longer be resolved by the traditional Portuguese religious system. Another revealing aspect of this text is the apparent contradiction between Queiroz's fascination with the Bible and his clear anti-clerical and anti-Catholic undertone. This is consistent with statements in some of Queiroz's novels (and mainly his famous book *The Crime of Father Amaro: Scenes from the Religious Life*) or other texts, in which the clergy is often portrayed as a corrupt and manipulative instrument of power with little concern for religious matters. In 1871, Queiroz started, together with Ramalho Ortigão (1836–1915), a monthly publication called *As Farpes*, in which we can read the following:

> Os beatos, as beatas, na religião não respeitam a divindade, respeitam os sacerdotes. Não prestam culto ao Deus, prestam culto ao padre. Para espíritos estreitos, embrutecidos, esterilizados, como os forma a devoção fanática, Deus e os mistérios, é alguma coisa de incompreensível, de vago, de distante, no fundo dos céus: pelo contrário o padre é o sempre presente e o sempre visível: é o padre que os confessa, os comunga, os penitencia, os doutrina, os guia. De sorte que, lentamente, todo o poder, toda a sabedoria a atribuem ao padre. Deus está num indefinido misterioso, na profundidade dos firmamentos: o padre está ali, na sua rua, o pé da sua casa, sempre pronto, e torna-se assim um Deus ao alcance dos sentidos e ao contacto da mão. (de Queiroz and Ortigão 2013, p. 445)
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> [The devout, both men and women, do not respect the divinity in religion; they appreciate the priests. They do not worship God; they worship the priest. For narrow-minded, brutalised, sterilised spirits, as fanatical devotion shapes them, God and mysteries are something incomprehensible, vague, distant, far away in the heavens: on the contrary, the priest is always present and always visible: it is the priest who confesses them, gives them communion, penance, doctrine, guidance. Thus, slowly, all power and wisdom are attributed to the priest. God is in an undefined mystery, in the depths of the firmaments: the priest is there, on his street, at the foot of his house, always ready, and thus becomes a God within reach of the senses and within hand's reach.]

An uncultured, illiterate and indifferent population, subservient only to an overpowering clergy, was a common theme in Portuguese literature and art at the end of the 19th century. Overall, there is a huge difference between a largely uneducated and illiterate population ruled by the Church, and a relatively small social elite, which is itself divided into two groups. On the one hand, there is the nobility, which has traditionally been closely aligned with the clergy. On the other hand, a small group of young intellectuals tends to be critical of traditional religion. Especially the so-called Coimbra generation (a group of intellectuals around Antero de Quental, who had all studied together in Coimbra in the 1860s) is exciting for religious scholars because it provided literary, (pre-)sociological and often very critical analyses of official religion and religiosity, while simultaneously seeking individual religious alternatives for their own use.

Concerning his friend Antero de Quental, Eça de Queiroz describes him as the personification of an ambivalent combination between religious self-determination and existential doubts, bearing in mind that he searched his whole life for alternatives, but without being satisfied with any of them. Miguel de Unamuno therefore regarded Antero de Quental as the primary representative of the "tragic sense of life", which he described in detail in his most famous philosophical work, *Del sentimiento trágico de* la vida (The Tragic Sense of Life,

1912—a book that was also included in the Index Librorum Prohibitorum). The tragic sense of Quental's life lies in the contradiction between an undefined transcendental longing and a rationality that does not allow the satisfaction of any religious aspiration (Dix 2007). Unamuno summarised this kind of tragic contradiction as a "longing for immortality" or as an eternal desire "to rationalise the irrational and to irrationalise the rational", even though everybody knows that this is entirely unreasonable (de Unamuno 2011, pp. 35–48 and pp. 237–38).

The situation of the famous modernist writer Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) was very similar. He had 35 books from the *Rationalist Press Association* (which published literature considered "too anti-religious" by other publishers) in his private library, and especially in his early life, Pessoa showed clear atheistic tendencies. He was explicitly and consistently anti-clerical and anti-Catholic, yet religious questions predominate in a significant part of his literary work. In a contemporary sociological study, Antero de Quental and Fernando Pessoa would probably appear under the category of "non-religion", although both were incessantly struggling with religious questions or doubts. This means that the statement "non-religion" would only be correct in relation to traditional Catholicism, and it is remarkable that in Portugal many people still regard Catholicism as synonymous with religion, or at least, with religion "as we understand it". However, the lives of both are full of "concomitant alternatives" and "vertical transfers". In Quental's case, we could speak of a kind of Buddhist Hellenism (Dix 2007, pp. 326–27). If we wanted to summarise Quental's Buddhist Hellenism with a modern sociological term, we could describe it with Robert Wuthnow's concept of a "patchwork religion", in which various elements are mixed simultaneously. As far as Pessoa is concerned, we should rather speak of a religious biography, since the various religious elements are not necessarily intertwined, but rather occur at different times. Concerning this religious biography, it is marked by atheistic, pagan, esoteric, and occult elements, combined with a lifelong fascination with astrology (Dix 2021). Another difference between the two is that Quental's "tragic sense of life" appears in Pessoa often as irony: "God is God's best joke." (Pessoa 2001, p. 236).

5. Portuguese Catholicism and the Question of Who Dominates the Discourse

A fundamental issue with historical social research is that methodologically reliable quantitative and qualitative studies have only been available for a relatively short period. Before the beginning of the 20th century, there were no systematic sociological studies on religious affiliation in Portugal. In this respect, one can find statements that seem entirely contradictory. As we mentioned earlier, a census conducted in 1900 shows that 99.87% of the Portuguese population identified as Catholic. The proportion of people belonging to non-Catholic religions was 0.09%, and 0.03% of the population stated they had no religion (cf. Vilaça 2006, p. 160). In fact, these figures are not surprising, but they are also hardly credible when it comes to describing Portugal as a homogeneously Catholic country. The implausibility of these numbers mainly arises when these figures are compared with statements from some contemporary observers. Only six years after that census, in 1906, the journalist Gomes dos Santos noted that, although there are a few regions in northern Portugal where the custom of daily mass is maintained, there is no sign of regular religious practice elsewhere in the country. In his view, of the 5 million Portuguese, no more than a tenth are practising Catholics, and religious life is limited to a few Catholic families who can be counted on one hand. He added that Paris was more religious than Lisbon at the time. Since several other contemporaries shared these statements independently of each other, one can consider them credible (cf. Dix 2010, pp. 10–13). Furthermore, after the official separation of Church and State in 1911, the new republican government advanced a strict anti-religious policy, which included, among other measures, the prohibition of Catholic

education, the legalisation of divorce, and the abolition of religious holidays. Referring to the historical sources cited so far, the picture of Portuguese society at the end of the 19th century and in the early decades of the 20th century would be as follows: An almost 100% Catholic population; an omnipotent clergy with seemingly little interest in religious matters; a general religious indifference among most of the population; several pagan remnants in the so-called *religiosidade popular* (peasant religiosity); a religiously practising minority, mainly from the north of the country or the nobility; a growing anti-clericalism within the Portuguese Republican Party (which led to the separation of Church and State in 1911); and several young urban intellectuals without religion, but with an intense interest in religious alternatives.

We would therefore have to assume that the number of almost 100% Catholics in the 1900 census was more a cultural factor than a confessional conviction. Furthermore, it is almost certain that the republican efforts were directed more against an omnipotent clergy than against religious practices among the people, which, according to several contemporary observers, were virtually non-existent, or at least a matter without any deeper conviction. In addition, the assumption of a certain religious indifference at that time is further reinforced by the simple fact that the Catholic Church began to consider a "re-Christianisation" of Portugal at the end of the 1920s. The primary concern of the *Concílio Plenário Português* in 1926 was to renew and strengthen Portuguese Catholicism after the separation of Church and State and the anticlericalism of the First Republic. As a result of this effort, the lay organisation *Acção Católica Portuguesa* was founded in November 1933. As in other European countries, the main aim of the *Acção Católica Portuguesa* was explicitly a "new crusade for the Christian reconquest". It was now the Church itself that recognised openly a certain ambivalence in surveys, in which Portugal appears to be almost entirely Catholic. In other words, the Church confirmed in the 1930s what Oliveira Martins or Ramalho Ortigão had already emphasised in the 1870s, or later, the journalist Gomes dos Santos in 1906. Now it was church representatives themselves who made the following statements:

> Não haja ilusões: o sector descristianizado é enorme e poderoso; além disso, dos muitos que nas estatísticas poderiam figurar como católicos, porque são baptizados e não renegaram formalmente a Cristo, são imensos os que pouco percebem, e menos praticam do Catolicismo que professam. (*apud* Fontes 1994, p. 71).
>
> [Let there be no illusions: the de-Christianised sector is enormous and powerful; moreover, of the many who could appear in the statistics as Catholics because they are baptised and have not formally renounced Christ, there are countless numbers who understand little and practise even less of the Catholicism they profess.]

It should be noted that the *Acção Católica Portuguesa* was very successful in the following years and had a distinctly nationalistic character, closely linked to a messianic and providential vision of the country. Divided into five different social sectors (agriculture, labour, independent professions, school education, university), this movement of lay people reached practically the whole of Portuguese society (Ibid. p. 79). The "new crusade for the Christian reconquest" was also highly effective politically, as there was a close relationship between the Patriarch of Lisbon Cardinal Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira and authoritarian dictator António de Oliveira Salazar, whose main political discourse was based on the trilogy "God, Fatherland, Family". Salazar's style of government was almost exclusively characterised by Catholic social doctrine and can easily be described as a fascistic-clerical style. Furthermore, the desired re-Christianisation of society was thoroughly linked to the (old) idea of a national union, which has a particular effect, frequently analysed in

contemporary sociological studies: Being Portuguese means being Catholic, regardless of whether one practices, believes, or is otherwise committed to faith. Alternatively, to put it quite simply: "Portuguese, therefore catholic" (cf. Teixeira 2023, p. 10).

Since the "Christian reconquest" was closely linked to Salazar's authoritarian regime and had a powerful nationalist character, two main consequences can be observed. In all censuses before the fall of Salazar's regime, Catholic religious affiliation remained very high, ranging from 93.13% (1940) to 97.89% (1960). In the first census after the democratic revolution in 1974, Catholic religious affiliation accounted for only 81.06% (1981), representing a decrease of about 17% (cf. Vilaça 2006, p. 160). In the last census in 2021, 80.2% of the Portuguese population declared themselves to be Catholic. On the one hand, one can conclude from the significant decline in Catholic religious affiliation in the period after the 1974 revolution that there is a correlation between official confession and the democratisation in Portugal.

Even though the trend is slightly decreasing, Catholic religious affiliation has remained relatively stable since the 1980s, at around 80%, which is a notably high figure compared to other European countries. However, this relatively high percentage is somewhat deceptive, and figures can be misleading, as the Portuguese theologian Teresa Toldy clearly pointed out in an interview, especially since the churches in Portugal are mostly empty at the time of mass (Público 2023). Various studies support the theologian's statements. For example, in the early 2000s, a major sociological study clearly established that higher levels of religious practice are only found in rural areas of northern or central Portugal. Furthermore, religious practice is predominantly limited to a social class of older people, mostly older women with a low level of education. A general intergenerational decline in religious practice was also confirmed (M. V. Cabral 2001, p. 69). The remarkable gap between self-identification as Catholic and low religious practice is also noted by more recent studies, such as the latest round of the European Social Survey. In contrast to a still very high level of self-identification as Catholic, only 5% said they attended religious services daily or several times a week. 64% of the population has no religious practice or only practices on special holidays (European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC) 2025). In this case, we might speak of a "cultural religion". This notion means one identifies with a religious community but is not actively religious oneself and does not participate in religious practices or does so only on special occasions. N.J. Demerath pointed out that this term is, in a sense, an oxymoron, but also redolent of Danièle Hervieu-Léger's "chains of memory" and Grace Davie's expression "believing without belonging" (Demerath 2000, p. 136). Demerath certainly develops a valid argument here, but the question remains whether "cultural religion" can lead also to a certain secular belief. In other words, it should be examined more closely to what extent cultural/religious belonging can go hand in hand with certain secular beliefs or convictions that, although they arose from theological principles, do not directly refer to them. Abby Day offers a very exciting approach to this topic. Ultimately, this once again raises the question of whether it still makes sense to work with the religious/secular dichotomy in future studies (Day 2011).

More recently, the term "culturalised religion" has also been used, which essentially means the same or a similar issue, insofar as it refers to "forms of religious identification, discourse, and expression that are primarily cultural in character, insofar as they are divorced from belief in religious dogma or participation in religious ritual" (Astor and Mayrl 2020, p. 209). A very detailed study of how the term "cultural religion" can be explicitly applied to Portugal was recently presented by Alfredo Teixeira. Regarding cultural Catholicism in Portugal, he writes: "Individuals may remain attached to the religious matrix in which they were socialized, independently of the evolution of their

positions. The weight of religion as an obligation or observance has decreased, but its place as memory may suffer various moldings" (Teixeira 2023, p. 23).

It can be assumed that this unequivocal discrepancy between a high (and self-declared) religious affiliation and empty churches continues to be related, in the short term, to the nationalist activities of the *Acção Católica Portuguesa* and, in the long term, to a generational cultural memory. Or, as it has just been mentioned: "Portuguese, therefore catholic." Once again, the question arises as to whether the gap between high self-identification as Catholic and relatively loose religious practice is a typically modern phenomenon. At the very least, it is noteworthy that even in historical sources, the adjective "indifferent" is found quite frequently. In that regard, we can recall the above quotation from Unamuno, from 1908, according to which "It is very often heard among the Portuguese (. . .) that here, in Portugal, the problems of religion are of no real interest to anyone." This statement is quite interesting, but it has never been sufficiently investigated, and any further statements on it would be purely hypothetical. However, we should emphasise that the adjective "indifferent" is of utmost importance. Years ago, Ingolf U. Dalferth pointed out that, fundamentally, the term "post-secular" implies indifference. He examined this at the level of the state, society and the individual (Dalferth 2010). Yet it is not certain if we can apply this model directly to historical Portugal, as an individual's indifference is, in a sense, always dependent on the extent to which society and the state are also indifferent.

Nevertheless, we should reiterate that the term "indifferent" is highly relevant for future studies. Therefore, the question remains whether the discrepancy between pure belonging and confessional obligation is a merely modern phenomenon that only emerged with the democratisation of the country. At the very least, historical evidence suggests that this discrepancy has existed, to some extent, throughout Portuguese religious history. However, this is another question that cannot be answered in this article.

Summarising our rapid passage through Portugal's religious history, we can conclude that, beneath the official Catholic discourse, a more or less hidden diversity, alternatives or different forms of belief and diverse positions on religion have always existed in Portugal. This does not concern the same quantity as in present times, but the real existence of "concomitant alternatives", "vertical transfers" or periods of varying degrees of indifference is undeniable. The real news is just that this diversity has become more visible and, in fact, tends to increase under democratic conditions and growing urbanisation. In 2019, a study was published that attempted to analyse the religious identities specifically in the greater urban area of Lisbon. The study was seen as a laboratory that would provide information on possible future developments throughout the country. The results were surprising (or not, depending on the perspective), mainly because only slightly more than half of the population (54.9%) in the greater Lisbon area still identifies as Catholic. 34.9% of the population fell into the category of "non-religion" (indifferent 4.9%, agnostic 6.9%, atheist 10.0%, and believer without religion 13.1%) (Teixeira et al. 2019b; Dix 2022). In particular, the group of "believers without religion" was examined more closely in a follow-up study, and it was found that this segment of the population:

> (. . .) can predominantly be located into a final periphery of the Catholic 'ecclesiosphere'. If one analyses the beliefs, the attitudes, and the socio-demographic profile of this segment of the population, it becomes clear that there are traces of surrogates of cultural Catholicism, with an evident distance from public religious practices. (Teixeira et al. 2019a, p. 441)

The explanation of the beliefs or worldviews of people who describe themselves as indifferent, agnostic, or atheist will be more challenging. We have only limited demographic information about their social status. Still, we know that they are mostly from the middle or upper-middle class, predominantly male, and have a higher level of education. The

numbers are interesting, especially as we can assume that members of this group are likely to hold critical social positions in the future (Dix 2022, pp. 189–205). This corresponds roughly to the social class from which Antero de Quental and Fernando Pessoa also came, who had distanced themselves, already during the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, from the Catholic sphere of their homeland. Pessoa and Quental are, of course, only two prominent examples, but they are most likely not exceptions. It can be assumed that the phenomenon of non-religion was already quite widespread among the Portuguese upper middle class at the time of Pessoa and Quental. This is exemplified by the so-called *Geração 70* (a 19th-century academic movement in Coimbra that sought to modernise several aspects of Portuguese culture), in which traditional Catholicism was viewed very critically, and various "concomitant alternatives" or "vertical transfers" were tried out (Dix 2007).

If we consider only the period since the 20th century, we can clearly see how a supposed "confessional Catholicism" has slowly but steadily developed into a "cultural religion". The conclusion of one of the most recent studies on the current situation of traditional Catholicism in Portugal is therefore entirely accurate: "On the one hand, the movement toward erosion is undeniable in terms of the relative weight of Catholics. Nevertheless, on the other hand, one of the properties of culturalized religion, namely its resistance, is also recognisable" (Teixeira 2023, p. 21).

However, this did not resolve a crucial issue raised in different ways by Jonathan Z. Smith and Burkhard Gladigow: Who determines the discourse on religious matters and who controls a particular religious symbol system? The problem is that, regarding European religious history up to the modern era, the available sources are primarily influenced by a dominant Christian discourse. Since Foucault, it has been widely recognised that knowledge and social reality in each society are determined and constructed by linguistic practices and the rules of a specific discourse. It is therefore also part of the analytical framework of a *European History of Religion* that this discourse formation is analysed or deconstructed in detail so that invisible structures and hidden social realities become observable.

In summary, we could say that studies on European religious history are still very often influenced, directly or indirectly, by church history. This church history certainly has its justification, but it tends to obscure the real religious culture at a particular point in history. Suppose one looks at the reality behind the official church history. In that case, it may be possible to find, like the poor Italian miller Domenico Scandella, known as Menocchio, even more worms and cheese in the interpretation of the universe. This means that European religious history has been largely shaped by Christianity, at least in the last 2000 years. However, this does not mean that beneath this Christian dominance was not also a considerable diversity of individual or, in some cases, collective religiosity that was not always in harmony with the official religion prescribed by religious experts. To dispute this would be to declare the historical European individual to be generally immature. This is a fact that should be taken into account in historical religious research, especially at the local level, in order to obtain a reasonably objective picture.

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