

## SPIRIT SOPHIA AND THE „NONE” MOVEMENT: AN ECUMENICAL MISSIONAL REFLECTION ON SPIRITUAL „NONES” OF THE UNITED STATES

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**Abstract:** *In the United States of America, increasing trends of people are identifying as „Spiritual but not Religious”. This new faith identity is unique-it does not bare the same pattern or logic as historic secularization, but is rather an entirely different phenomenon. The Christian Ecumenical Mission movement must take this reality seriously as Christians discern how God is at work in the world and how Christians are to participate in such work. This paper explores the spiritual identity of the „Spiritual but not Religious” and then works towards a missional theology that recognizes and values this identity.*

**Keywords:** „none” spiritual but not religious, „ecumenical mission”, Christian, United States of America, secularization, Holy Spirit.

When I first began working at Harborview Medical Center, the Trauma Hospital for the Pacific Northwest of the United States, I first encountered the term „*Spiritual but not Religious*”. Harborview’s electronic charting system documents each patient’s religious affiliation, and „*Spiritual but not Religious*” is one often documented in our patients’ charts. The Spiritual Care department at Harborview believes that if we know a patients’ religious and/or denominational affiliation, we can better meet their emotional and spiritual needs; If we have a basic understanding of a patients’ world view-what they may hold close, the theological places where they may find comfort-we can offer holistic care. You can imagine my surprise when I opened a patient’s chart on my first week of hospital ministry and read „*Spiritual but not Religious*”. I am familiar with the term. It has been used among my friend groups and in secular places of work. But, as a Chaplain, a minister, how do I engage with, serve, and pastor a patient who identifies as religiously „*nothing in particular?*”.

In the United States of America, the group of individuals who identify as „*Spiritual but not Religious*”, commonly self-titled „*Nones*”, has increased from 19%, to 27%, in the past five years.<sup>1</sup> This increase in „*Nones*” corresponds to a 9% decrease in people who identify as „*Religious and Spiritual*”. The trend is undeniable: „*Nones*” are on the rise

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<sup>1</sup> „*More Americans now saying they are Spiritual but not Religious*”. Pew Research Center, Washington, D. C. (September 6, 2017). See: [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org), accessed in November 2017.

in the U. S. The „None” movement creates a new paradigm for ministers and churches, and in particular to ministerial conception of Missions. The United States has witnessed periods of secularization, for example in the 60s, but the current trend of secularization is unique. Political scientists and anthropologists are calling this phenomenon „soft secularism”,<sup>2</sup> secularization with a sensitivity and openness to the spiritual, the unknown, the divine. This unprecedented phenomenon has become interconnected with the traditional religious systems despite obvious possible contentions throughout the U. S. The Ecumenical movement must form a missional response to these new paradigm shifts in affiliation. Guided by Post-Postmodern Missional paradigms, Critical Theological Reflection, and the Ecumenical document, *Together Towards Life*, this paper ultimately aims to explore an ecumenical missional response to the „Nones” of the United States.

The current discussion centers around „Praxis Theology” as a theological framework. Praxis theology takes seriously the contextual and intersectional story unfolding beneath any theological question and believes that revelation rises from the conversation between different layers of contextually. Praxis theology, otherwise known as „Theological Reflection”, brings „theological values” to the center of reality through a conversation between „experience, context, and religious tradition”.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, Praxis Theology is a „process of interpreting faith in a context for the sake of the church, as it seeks to fulfill its missions to bring forth the reign of God in the world”.<sup>4</sup> The rise of „Nones” in the United States is a new phenomenon and thus requires new theological reflection.

Praxis Theology is founded upon three major tenants: experience, context, and tradition. Following as such, this exploration begins with „experience”, an analysis of the demographical make-up of the growing group of „Nones” and of the practical and daily lives of „Nones”. The first section asks about „Nones” spiritual identity-what trends characterize „Nones” spirituality? Then this paper will move to the „context”, to studying the epistemologies and missional paradigms relevant for to the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century-Why do „Nones” elicit theological questions about the missional identity of the church? Finally, the third

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<sup>2</sup> „Q & A: A look at what’s driving the changes seen in our Landscape Study”, Pew Research Center, Washington, D. C. (May 27, 2015). See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> Dianne Bergant, Faustino M. Cruz, Kathleen Dorsey-Bello, Bernard J. Lee, Maureen R. O’Brien, *Theological Reflection for Transformation*, Chicago, U. S. Religious Life, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

component of this paper mirrors the third component of theological reflection: religious „*tradition*”. How does Christian tradition speak to the „*None*” phenomenon? In a mutual conversation between experience, context, and tradition, what new missional ideas immerge?

### Who is „*None*”?

Who are the „*Nones*”? And how did this term, „*None*”, become attributed to them? „*Nones*” are individuals who answer „*none*” or „*nothing in particular*” when asked with what religious group they are affiliated.<sup>5</sup> As noted above, this group is increasing in numbers and, according to Pew Research, these numbers will most likely increase-by 2050 Pew Research projects a 89% increase compared to a 26% population increase in North America.<sup>6</sup> „*Nones*” are on the rise in the United States, but *who* are the „*Nones*”? What populations of people choose to identify in this way? Majority of „*Nones*” (70%) were influenced in childhood by a religious group. These previous „*someblings*” attribute non-belief (49%) and a distrust of institutionalized religion (20%) as the major factors why they turned from „*someblings*” to „*nothing in particular*”. Studies also illuminate that „*Nones*” tend to be a multi-racial, multi-ethnic group yet the largest group are Caucasian males. „*Nones*” are an average age of 30, which means the majority of „*Nones*” are Millennials.<sup>7</sup> Unlike European secularization, which grew into secularization one generation at a time, secularization in the United States is springing from a single generation, the millennials. Also, unique to the „*Nones*”, this group tends to be accepting and non-hostile towards religious groups. As political scientist David Campbell explains: „*many of the „nones” are not actively opposed or hostile to religion, and that some of them might even be attracted to a new form of religion*”.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the term „*secularization*” limits complete understanding of this spiritual trend. Although there is a religious decline, there is a spiritual increase. Although this phenomenon is a type of secularization, it is something all-together different in that this group of „*Nones*” still

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing our Religion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> „Religiously Unaffiliated”, Pew Research Center, Washington D. C. (April 2, 2015). See: [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org), accessed in November 2017.

<sup>7</sup> „The Changing Religious Composition of the U. S.”. Pew Research Center, Washington D.C (May 12, 2015). See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

acknowledges the possibility of God, and consequently the purpose or identity of the church.

Elizabeth Drescher conducts an ethnographic research project on the „None” group in her book, *Choosing our Religion*. In this study, Drescher interacts with a variety of people who identify as „Nones” and then reflects, subjectively and objectively, on her experiences. Drescher emphasizes that „Nones” are not a group at all, but rather a „spectrum” between religious Affiliation and Non-Affiliation. Drescher explains that „If we understand „None-ing” as a spectrum and in a „porous” relationship with the religiously affiliated, then we can name some particular attributes, consistent across the spectrum”.<sup>9</sup> Through these interactions and the empirical data she gathered, Drescher offers six themes of „None” group: Ethical Action; valuing human physicality, or the body; exploration of a wide array of spiritual wisdom; tending to intimate relationships between family members and friends; participating in ritualistic ceremony and practice in ways that mark and expand traditional boundaries of sacred space and time; upholding values of diversity, mystery, unpredictability, and wonder.<sup>10</sup> This group of individuals is deeply committed to living with others in peace and acceptance. They tend to be a proactive group of people, practically convinced that no divine being will fix what needs to be fixed or create what needs to be created, these individuals tend to be empowered to act and initiate.

### **Christians Missions&„Nones”**

This brief introduction into the worldview of „Nones” creates a foundation for discernment of the Church’s missional call in relationship with this „porous spiritual spectrum” of individuals. But what exactly is the Christian motivation for this discernment? Are missional questions a morally sound response to this new group of people?

Christian ecclesiology is centered around mission. Just as God sends God’s son into the world, incarnating God’s self in hope of reaching to God’s creation, so too God’s people are sent into relationship with others. Christian Missions is about incarnation, about witnessing to the story of God’s love because it is the only way to authentically be in the world. The Church is the „communion of Christian

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing our Religion*, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

*disciples*”, an „*inclusive community*” in existence to being „*healing and reconciliation to the world*”.<sup>11</sup>

And so, Christians are in constant conversation with this question of inclusivity. The Christian call to inclusivity, healing, and reconciliation cause leaders to reflect on the new relationships forming with new groups of people. What kinds of new groups are Christians called to serve and to engage? What is the „*good news*” for these people? It boils down to a simple question: where is God in this newness and how are Christians called to respond? This is a missional call. *Together Towards Life* expresses the same question: „*How can we proclaim God’s love and justice to a generation living in an individualized, secularized, and materialized world?*”<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that Missional theology has never been written in stone, but rather is an unfolding, expanding cannon of wisdom. Since the apostles began preaching and baptizing in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Missional identity in the Church and among ecumenical societies has shifted and changed. For example, in Edinburgh at the 1910 World Mission Conference, John Mott advocated to „*evangelize to the whole world in one generation*” with the goal of converting the world to Christianity. Only forty years later at the 1952 conference Hoekendijk’s theology was preaching a new „*good news*”, the mission of „*shalom*” in the world. This gospel of service advocated for missional goals to focus on working toward the kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, mercy, peace, and freedom.

The heartbeat center of Missions changes as time unfolds, but is always seeking to express the same thing: bearing witness to the good news of Christ. As Emilio Castro affirmed in his work on Evangelism, „*The only valid theological method for evangelism is conscious participation in the whole of human life and its problems... evangelism is a question not of apologetics but of life*”.<sup>13</sup> Evangelism and mission require being awake and in love with the world around us; Evangelism and mission require Christians to respond to the ways human beings are finding meaning, purpose, God in their lives and to ask the essential question: *What is the good news today?* And what is the good news for the „*Nones*”, and, possibly an even more difficult question, what is the good news being shared with Christians through this „*None*” movement?

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<sup>11</sup> Jooseop Keum (editor), *Together Towards Life*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2013, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Emilio Castro, „Evangelism”, in Nicholas Lossky et al. (editors), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, World Council of Churches Publications, 1991, p. 400.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Missional Paradigms

Christianity and the „None” phenomenon of the United States do not live in a vacuum together. These two systems of meaning-making exist in a broader context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a Post-Postmodern world.<sup>14</sup> Post-Postmodern age challenges the pervious eras conception of truth, which, for classical and popular conception of missions, is an essential element of missiology. The ideologies of the enlightenment-progress, reason, and science-initiated missional expansion and missional expansion, at times, interlaced with the powers that be, which had detrimental effects like colonization, imperialism and even globalization. When thinking missionally, theologians must engage context-the philosophical, anthropological, social and political trends that make up our shared world.

Christians believe in an incarnate God that „lives and moves and has his being” with and among humanity in humanity’s various forms, trends, and realities. The Christian hope is to locate God’s healing work in the world, as it is today. And so, to create or form a missional response to the „None” movement, one must understand the missional epoch, the paradigm of thought and action poignant to the time. The Post-Postmodern world has challenged the epistemologies of mission theologies bred in the Enlightenment and raised in Modernity and Postmodernity. The ideals of the Enlightenment set into motion territorial, cultural, and spiritual expansion, by which Christians perpetuated colonial oppression and eurocentrism. The Post-Postmodern age presents much-needed critiques of previous epistemologies at the center of traditional missional theology in three important ways: 21<sup>st</sup> Century paradigms of thought highlight missional limitations, advocate for missional interdependence, and reveal a new kind of missional hope.

Postmodernism realized that truth is subjective-that humans are limited by personal bias.<sup>15</sup> But the Post-Postmodern age has begun to surface another epistemological idea called „Critical Realism”. As Hiebert explains, „Critical Realism” asserts that human beings are limited and

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<sup>14</sup> This paper uses the term „Post-Postmodern” to describe the coming era, what follows Postmodern age. There are currently different terms naming this epoch, but the name has not been agreed upon in the academy.

<sup>15</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, „Anthropology, Missions, and Epistemological Shifts”, in Charles E. Van Engen, Darrell Whiteman, J. Dudley Woodberry (editors), *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness*, New York, Orbis Books, 2008, p. 16.

cannot ever fully understanding the reality of another person.<sup>16</sup> But, „*Critical Realism*” uses mind-maps to depict how individual world views function. People map the truth of their lives, and others may be able to grasp pieces or places of said map. One can imagine another’s conceptual map and this imaginative process reaches toward a Post-postmodern concept of „*truth*”. An important aspect of this epistemology is its’ ambivalence towards truth or truth-finding as a value. Truth is not the highest value, directly challenging Enlightenment ideologies.

21<sup>st</sup> century ways of knowing also critique the ideals of progress and optimism.<sup>17</sup> As previously stated, the Enlightenment brought a kind of affection for and obsession with progress. Progress was an inherent „*good*”. The Post-Postmodern world view challenges this idea by realizing that progress is unmeasurable when considering the multiple and endless realities at work in the world. Is progress an inherent good when it requires suffering, death, and destruction from some part of the population? Post-Postmodern world views do not believe in progress as an inheritgood, but rather a contextual good, measurable by the world view „*maps*” of those affected by the „*progress*”.

The current missional epoch also challenges traditional values of independence. In the beginning of missional movements there was an emphasis on expansion, on individuals leaving their places of origin and entering foreign lands to spread the gospel. The Enlightenment encouraged individualistic thinking—you can find your happiness and your own ideas, and you can choose your own life. But this kind of world view does not take into consideration how „*your happiness*” for example, may affect another’s happiness. During modernity, faithful people from the „*Younger Churches*” in the global South began to ask for independence from the missional churches who „*founded*” them. The damaging effects of colonization were being realized. „*Younger Church*” began to grieve the lost cultures, practices, and lifestyle overpowered by Christians who colonized their communities. At the 1958 World Mission conference in Accra, Ghana African churches pleaded for the American and European missionaries to leave their churches in order to empower African leadership in their communities.<sup>18</sup> Missionaries began leaving their

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York, Orbis, 2011, pp. 364-370.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Simon (lecture), *6<sup>th</sup> World Mission Conference*, Bossey Ecumenical Institute, November 2, 2017.

„mission fields” and churches in the Global South became more and more „interdependent” during the modern and post-modern eras. Post-modernity has turned a new corner in the name of „interdependence”.

Individualization and the value of independence eventually led to a „heteronomy”, the freedom to believe whatever one chooses to believe, which ends in a kind of self-alienation.<sup>19</sup> The Post-postmodern world grew from this kind of isolated reality-as the old saying goes, every man is an island. But this kind of isolation is intolerable, and incompatible with the complete experience of living. The Post-Postmodern era is open to new ideas about interdependence, a kind of autonomy that requires relationship, interconnection, and dependence. Interdependence connects to Post-postmodern conception of „truth”. If „truth” is a kind of map, constructed through relationship with others’ maps and understandable only through empathy, compassion, deep listening and humility, then „truth” also is a kind of interdependence.

Which leads us to the final Post-Postmodern revelation addressed in this paper: Missional Hope. Post-postmodern epistemological frameworks no longer order faith and truth in „Cause and effect” logic.<sup>20</sup> Previous, „cause and effect” logic dominated the rewards systems at work in the social and economic world. If you work hard, you get paid, and you can eat, rest, live. If you push a person, they fall. If you pray for healing, your loved-one will be healed. The Post-postmodern world is suspicious of this logic. In the Post-postmodern world, experience is valued and experience proves the „cause-and-effect” logic incongruent with reality. You may work hard, and you may still not have enough money to eat, rest, live. You push a person, they may be stronger. You may pray for healing, but your loved-one maystaysick. The Post-Postmodern world is not interested in facades, false hope, or smokescreens. Instead this mode of thinking accepts and values ambiguity, risk, imagination, and possibility. There is no clear guarantee in life, but the *risk* in life is where hope truly lives. Thus, Missional hope of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is no longer found in concrete outcomes like conversions, houses, healings or even humanitarian work. Missional hope can no longer be understood in a cause-and-effect relationship. Rather, it is now found in contextual realities, in grassroots narratives that describe moments of togetherness, empowerment, freedom, and love.

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<sup>19</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, p. 370.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 364.



## Theological Reflection: Mission as Sophia; Mission as the Spirit of Wisdom

*Together Towards Life*, the 2013 Ecumenical Statement on Missions upholds the Holy Spirit's saction in the world as a guiding light to Christian Missional discernment. The document proclaims, „*Life in the Holy Spirit is the essence of mission, the core of why we do what we do and how we live our lives*”.<sup>21</sup> Together Towards Life also asserts that the Holy Spirit has „transformative” power and encourages readers to „reclaim mission as a transformative spirituality”.<sup>22</sup> Following the Ecumenical movement and upholding the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, as the Missional center for the „changing and diverse world today”, the question facing Christianity in the United States becomes clear: How is the Spirit moving in the lives of the „Nones”? How is God's mission already unfolding in and through this new spiritual uprising?

The book of Proverbs offers an image of the Spirit of Wisdom, *bokmah*, or Sophia in Greek, and this image speaks directly to the Post-postmodern context in the United States. The Spirit of Wisdom preaches a message of „punishment and promise”. Sophia is a complex paradox, a powerful figure of critique that „lures human beings to life”. Named „truth”, Sophia becomes a guide, edifying Christian relationship with the „None” community in the United States, and walking through the murky waters of Post-postmodern „truth”.<sup>23</sup> The Spirit of Wisdom claims „truth” but only in the world of life. What brings about life, new life, is truth. In this way, she may be trusted by Post-postmodern thinkers because she too imagines truth without ever reaching truth or claiming truth, except in her own self-understanding as „God's darling”, who „pervades the universe as one who holds all things together”. She is not in one single place or institution, but rather emerging from the world in mysterious and unpredictable ways. If we think of Missions as the Spirit of Sophia, then the Christian relationship with the „Nones” must be one of mutual learning, respect, and sharing, one of mutual access to the „pervading” Spirit of Wisdom.

Elizabeth Johnson describes the Spirit-Sophia as both a demanding „street preacher” who „cries aloud in the market and at the city gates a message of reproach, punishment and promise” as well as a „mother” with „re-creativeagency, the power to make all things green again”.<sup>24</sup> The Spirit as Wisdom both works

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<sup>21</sup> JooseopKeum (editor), *Together Towards Life*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She who is*, New York, Crossroads Press, 1994, pp. 86-90.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

to „*reproach*”, deconstruct, criticize, as well as recreate, renew, edify. With this understanding, Christian Missional thought can be both challenged and renewed by the Spirit in this journey toward relationship with the „*Nones*”.

The „*None*” movement provokes a missional call for self-reflection, for critical contemplation on the ecclesial identity of the church: how is the church living and moving in the world? The Spirit of Wisdom is one that „*lures*” people into life. In reference to the before-mentioned data, it would seem that the Spirit is „*luring*” young people out of the church and into new forms of spiritual awakening. Why is this happening? As previously explained, „*Nones*” who were once „*Somebings*” attribute their conversion, in large part to the hierarchical and institutionalized identities of the church. Is the Spirit of Wisdom speaking through the „*None*” movement, challenging the church to self-reflect on what is hindering its effectiveness?<sup>25</sup> The „*Nones*” are a voice of renewal for the church to reconsider how the church understands itself *structurally*. The same suspicion that new generations of people have towards political structures and corporations is offered and associated with the church. Is the church just another organization in the competitive market?<sup>26</sup> If the church is self-aware, realizing that it is no longer the „*guardian of ethical values*”,<sup>27</sup> then would the church be structured the same? How has the church been humbled? And how has this humility changed the infrastructure?

The „*Nones*” in the United States do not feel hostile or resentful towards religious groups,<sup>28</sup> to claim „*None*” is to „*refuse to participate in the normative system of religious identification*”,<sup>29</sup> but this refusal is not one of resentment or hostility, simply one of preference. How are Christians called to engage with the „*Nones*” indifference towards religion, towards the church? Missional theology began with a savior-complex. The apostles gave up their lives for a kingdom they believed was soon coming. Early missionary movements emphasized conversion as the goal of missionary work, the goal of Christian faith. Since the Willinger Worlds Missions Conference in 1952 the theological center of ecumenical Christian missions has shifted from human agency to God’s

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<sup>25</sup> J. Andrew Kirk, „Mission in the West: On Calling of the Church in a Postmodern Age”, in Thomas F. Frost, George R. Hunsberger, J. Andrew Kirk, and Werner Ustorf (editors) *A Scandalous Prophet*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 2002, p. 125.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.

<sup>28</sup> „Q & A: A look at what’s driving the changes seen in our Landscape Study”.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing our Religion*, p. 30.

agency. Missions are now understood as participation in „*God’s mission*”. Human beings cannot convert other human beings, but rather, as the TTL explains, „*authentic evangelism is grounded in humility and respect for all and flourishes in the context of dialogue*”.<sup>30</sup> Christians cannot invoke Christian belief in „*Nones*”. This is not the aim of missions nor an ethical mindset towards individuals who identify this way.

The second most common reason „*Nones*” converted from „*Somebings*” to „*nothing in particular*” is a belief that the institution of the church is to be „*distrusted*”. In this study, individuals cited their reasons for distrust: „*religious connection with power and politics*”, „*religion causes major conflict*”, „*religion does more bad than good*”.<sup>31</sup> Political Scientist David Campbell cites this first reason-religious tradition co-mingles with politics-as the most prevalent reason among millennials.<sup>32</sup> The rise of „*Nones*” reflects a clear distaste for the co-mingling of civil religion and Christian religion. It might be that the Christian missional call is not only to reimagine the hierarchical structures at work in the churches, but also to consider how these structures have given to Caesar what is God’s.

This is no small task. The co-mingling of religious language with political ideology dates back to the founding fathers. As political scientist and social anthropologist Jon Meacham writes in *American Gospel*, „*The line between theology and theocracy (and public religion and consuming religious fervor) ... is a very thin one*”.<sup>33</sup> For example, the Christian belief in God’s divine providence became a political justification for expansion. Because God ordained the making of the United States, God must have ordained the massacre of native people and culture in the land. This same theme of providence can be seen today in political platforms that uplift the United States above other countries-„*Make American Great Again*”-because of a God-ordained position in the world. The „*None*” movement is, in a way, responding to the detrimental ways the church has been mistress to the State. The „*Nones*” do not answer the questions for Christians, but the movement redirects the Christian missional call, not externally, but internally. How can Christians preach and live Gospel values without using divisive political agendas? And how can Christians live well as civilians without claiming God as their political running mate?

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<sup>30</sup> JooseopKeum (editor), *Together Towards Life*, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> „Why American „Nones” left Religion Behind”. Pew Research Center, Washington D. C. (August 24, 2016). See: [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org), accessed in November 2017.

<sup>32</sup> „Q & A: A look at what’s driving the changes seen in our Landscape Study”.

<sup>33</sup> Jon Meacham, *American Gospel*, New York, Random House, 2006, p. 129.

Spirit-Sophia is not only depicted as a figure of „*reproach*” and criticism, but also a figure of „*dwelling*” a „*tree of life*”, a place of safety for life to grow. As the Spirit of Wisdom calls Christians to be a place of refuge and dwelling for the world, then the church must reflect on what it means to be a place of safety for „*Nones*”. Although „*Nones*” are increasing in population, they are often times still populating pews, services, and events held by religious communities. As Drescher illuminates in her ethnography, „*Nones*” are „*hardly distinct or isolated from the spirituality of somes*”.<sup>34</sup> She goes on to explain that the „*Nones*” think, behave, and even experience life in ways that Christians and other religious traditions might find „*spiritually significant*”. An individual’s experience of doubt is one aspect of spiritual experience that the „*Nones*” and Christians share. Doubt is not a singular experience but a spectrum of continuous moments. „*Nones*” experience this doubt to the point of identifying outside of religious structures, but „*Nones*” also refuse to reject spirituality. Instead, „*Nones*” uphold mystery, ambiguity, the ‘beyond’ has more profound than religious institutions’ capacity to express. Christians throughout history have expressed doubt as an avenue to faith, or as a necessary clarifier of faith. Thus, the boundary between „*Nones*” and Christians is a porous boundary of faith and doubt, one in which both sides are continually and purposely transgressing. The Ecumenical Missional response to this boundary then is one of acceptance, acknowledgement, and welcome.

Along with sharing this relationship with doubt, „*Nones*” also share a similar understanding of time with Christians. Human immortality binds all humans together in a kind of sacred and unknowing relationship with time. „*Nones*” tend to understand this relationship in evolutionary terms—there is time and deep time. Christians tend to understand this relationship in religious terms—sacred time and sacred space. But all hold reverence toward the clock that keeps ticking. Within these time limitations, „*Nones*” and Christians alike seek to interpret life, to find and create meaning, purpose, inspiration for living. And a common practice shared between „*Nones*” and Christians is a posture of Thanksgiving, offering praise, showing or practicing gratefulness. No one can explain why humans are given life, but we all find peace in offering thankfulness for the life we have been given.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing our Religion*, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Author Adam Gopnik in an interview with Krista Tippett through On Being talks about the „*ironies*” of spiritual like in a secular age in the United States. He identifies the „*Spiritual but not Religious*” person’s relationship with time and desire to „*give thanks*”

Dreacher calls these shared or common experiences of life „*spiritually significant*” to other Christian or religious groups. The Spirit of Wisdom, spirit of truth, is one that is inclusive to all of society, actively working to make others’ a home in an often lonely existence. How can these shared, holy experiences of life expand the ecumenical missional mind in a way that includes „*Nones*”, not as individuals to convert, but as human beings to learn from, include, share with, and care for?

Johnson offers one action of Spirit-Sophia that is explicitly religious: Sophia is „*gracing*” the world, opening new spaces for people to meet God. In *She Who Is*, Johnson journeys through the Old and New Testament, exploring the many instances where Spirit-Sophia becomes the connection between human beings and God: From creating the „*covenantal bonds that turn Israelites into the people of God*” to leading Jesus through „*fasting prayer and temptation in the desert... anointing him [jesus] to peace good news*”.<sup>36</sup> Spirit-Sophia in the Biblical narrative is at the heart of religious and spiritual connection to God. If Spirit-Sophia is gracing the world, opening spaces for God’s people to meet God, then it must be our missional hope to be one of these places for the „*Nones*”. The Post-postmodern conception of Missional hope is not something concrete, determined, or measurable, but rather a contextual story that mirrors the good news of Christ. A Christian Missional hope may be to become a meeting place for „*Nones*” and God. Of course, I do not mean conversion, but rather encounter. That „*Nones*” encounter Christian experience of God because Christians are embodying the beloved story, and through this incarnational witness, Christians participate with Spirit-Sophia in creating spaces where humans and God encounter one another.

Theological reflection leads to „*transformative action*”. Theological reflection is embodied and lived, at work in the world. Praxis theology must move from the armchairs to the streets or else it fails completely. Thus, the Church must grant space and meaning for those who claim this religious identity, such that welcomes, holds, allows their spirituality to illuminate the truth of the Spirit, and takes seriously their critique if Mission is to resemble Wisdom in the world, in the United States, and among the growing communities of „*Nones*”.

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mirrors with religious/non-rational practice. See: Adam Gopnik, „Practicing Doubt, Redrawing Faith”, interviewed by Krista Tippett, *On Being*, 7 December 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She who is*, pp. 139-141.

## Conclusion

At the Public Hospital in Seattle, WA where I first began Chaplain ministry, the words „*Spiritual but not Religious*” grew more familiar and I came to accept the thought that I often could not anticipate what awaited in a patient’s room. One afternoon, I was notified of a patient who was transitioning to „*Comfort Care*” that evening, sooner than the patient and family expected. This meant the patient would soon die and treatment would shift into a phase of granting comfort. The family wanted to hold a service, a ritual to honor the patient, but everyone in the family identified as „*nothing in particular*”. Because time is short and God is good, I was able to find a protestant service for patients transitioning to comfort care, and I began editing the service. Then we met together to honor the life of this person. We read poems instead of Bible verses; Wead dressed a prayer to „*the spirit of love*”; And, in the end, the family shared memories about the patient’s life, characteristicsthe patient’s family would miss, and moments they would cherish forever in their hearts-another kind of benediction.

I hold this story close to my own heart because, for me, it was holy. Bereft of „*proper*” terminology and performance, yet rich with meaning and the presence of God. It was a beautiful service and arguably a kind of prophetic image for this research. If truth exists only in the reception of truth, then I cannot help but believe whatever I call Christ’s love appeared and was known in those brief moments. That family will name it what they choose. But who I am to deny the holiness of this evening? Mission theology is essential, not because the world is changing and Christians must „*keep up*” with the new trends of belief to keep our claim and place in the world. Missional theology matters because it becomes an embodied reality. It walks upon and lives in the world. It is a witness of love-or of hate.