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## Research Note: RAMP Findings and Making Sense of the ‘God Within Each Person, Rather than Out There’

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PAUL HEELAS & DICK HOUTMAN

**ABSTRACT** *This research note provides selected ‘belief’ data from the RAMP (Religious and Moral Pluralism) survey—data of an apparently arresting nature. The present discussion is primarily directed at offering several hypotheses to do with interpretations and explanations of the data. The overarching aim is to contribute to a research agenda which is of considerable significance for the sociological study of spirituality and religion, with profound implications for policy makers.*

### Introduction

Some time ago, one of us reflected on the development of a ‘betwixt and between’ zone: a ‘middle ground’ with regular church attenders to one side, atheists/agnostics to the other; a ground where many forms of the sacred are to be found, including ‘New Age’ spiritualities of life (Heelas, “Spiritual Revolution” 361). Recently, David Voas has carried out a similar ‘middle ground’ research exercise (the term is used in Voas and Crockett 24). Using the European Social Survey and drawing on the categories of the International Social Survey Programme, Voas “pinpoint[s] the emergence of what he describes as ‘fuzzy fidelity’, an attitude of uncommitted but real interest in God and spiritual matters” (Pigott 42; see also Smith). “Its adherents”, Pigott states, “include half the population of Britain and similar proportions in other European countries” (42): a percentage which is not all that different from that previously found by Heelas (66%, “Spiritual Revolution” 361). Further, broadly in line with Heelas, Voas attributes the numerical growth of the ‘fuzzy faithful’ to the fact that “people are ceasing to be ‘actively religious’ much more quickly than they are becoming wholly secular” (Pigott 42).<sup>1</sup>

A primary task for those interested in religion and spirituality in contemporary Western settings is to explore this ‘middle ground’. It is a primary task for a variety of reasons, most generally because, in a number of European countries (and elsewhere, no doubt), it is the most populated territory of the sacred, probably expanding in size. More specifically, and to ask some significant questions, do we find ‘fuzzy fidelity’ with “a vaguely defined notion of a ‘divine entity’”, which makes “little difference” to the lives of “believers”, as Pigott states, summarizing Voas (43), paving the way for secularity? Do we find a more substantial interest in more particular forms of spirituality, specifically that inner-life spirituality which is taken to be in and of the depths of life itself, within the middle ground? Do we find evidence to support Charles

Taylor's 'exclusive humanism' of the 'immanent frame' of 'a secular age' or do we find evidence of the sacralisation of humanistic values and assumptions? Does the evidence support Grace Davie's 'believing but not belonging' thesis, when the primary form of 'believing' is informed by Christianity? Turning briefly to policy makers, findings are obviously going to have, or rather should have, profound implications: how religion/spirituality is taught in schools; how nurses attend to 'spiritual needs'; for GP referrals; for the subjective well-being industry (including the marketing of holistic spas), and so on.

### **On Not Taking RAMP Data at Face Value**

Carried out by teams of researchers in eleven European countries, the RAMP (Religious and Moral Pluralism) survey of the later 1990s covered Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden. As to the composition of the questionnaire, Eileen Barker writes:

Having become familiar with unchurched seekers and New Age practitioners in my qualitative research, I was eager to include questions that would enable us [the European team] to explore the distribution and content of spirituality. My suggestions were, however, met with scepticism...not only would our respondents have no idea what we meant if we were to ask them about spirituality, but we would have no idea what they meant if they responded to such questions. It was gently suggested that perhaps I had spent too much time talking to "weirdoes" in California. (Barker 32)

However, Barker won the day. A 'spirituality' question appeared in the questionnaire. Asking "Which of these statements comes nearest to your own belief?", the survey retained four response options of the kind already in use: "I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship", "I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force", "I don't believe in any kind of God, spirit, or life force", and "I really don't know what to believe". In addition, the researchers included "I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there". This is the option which makes RAMP rather important.<sup>2</sup> 92% of respondents "were willing to answer" the relevant question, with percentages ranging from 18 (Hungarians) to 3 (Britons and Dutch) for those who had problems with the concept (Barker 33–4). As for other key RAMP 'belief' questions, four of the five response options mentioned above have been in regular use in transnational surveys. This entails that they are no more or less problematic in the context of RAMP than in other survey settings. Further, it is very unlikely that the 'God within' question raises difficulties in connection with translation or cross-cultural intelligibility.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the five options provided by the key RAMP 'belief' question 'force' respondents to make a choice. Options might not match their 'beliefs' (if that is the most appropriate term), so they need to choose the closest response option. Although such a question then almost necessarily fails to record participant 'beliefs' accurately and is even likely to distort them rather seriously, the responses come to be treated as fact. Indeed, bearing in mind that there are significant output differences between questionnaires using different 'belief' options, it is clear that the process of 'forcing' is operative.<sup>4</sup> It is also true that

the great majority of respondents have grounded reasons for selecting their particular option. Although it might not quite match their 'belief', 'serious' respondents will *surely* select the closest, most approximate option, which means that rather than being random, the choice must have certain *indicative* value. After all, respondents chose x, not y, q, p or d; and, despite options being open to interpretation, *this* choice is by no means entirely misleading for the researcher.

This research note discusses what respondents may actually have meant when ticking "I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there". Our point of departure is Barker's landmark essay of 2004, "The Church Without and the God Within". Her findings, like the fact that 39% of the adult population of Catholic Portugal believe in 'the God within, rather than without', are rather astonishing. 'Beyond belief', some might say. We hope to open up some tentative interpretative possibilities, which take the form of conjectures—conjectures informed by the RAMP findings, by theoretical considerations, and by contextual, socio-cultural data, most obviously using other sections of RAMP or other questionnaires.<sup>5</sup> The present text is a research note rather than an article with determinate conclusions, because it aims to provide testable hypotheses concerning the more plausible of the interpretative and explanatory possibilities.

### Key RAMP Findings

Drawing on Barker's summary of relevant findings (38), we find that 33% of respondents selected the option "I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship", 29% "I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there", 15% "I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force", 12% "I don't believe in any kind of God, spirit or life force", and 10% "I really don't know what to believe". Focusing on the second highest percentage—the respondents selecting the "God within, rather than out there" option—we present the overall average of 29%, derived from the national data (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** "God within" percentages (all RAMP respondents).

Country	%	N
Portugal	39	979
Great Britain	37	1423
Sweden	36	1007
Italy	36	2149
Denmark	35	597
Belgium	31	1659
Finland	29	758
Netherlands	26	1002
Norway	25	480
Hungary	25	979
Poland	18	1133
Total	29	12166

**Table 2.** 'God within' and 'personal God': percentage differences (all RAMP respondents).

Country	God within	Personal god	God within/Personal god
Sweden	36	18	18
Denmark	35	20	15
Great Britain	37	23	14
Portugal	39	26	13
Belgium	31	22	9
Netherlands	26	23	3

Evoking images of large numbers of adult Europeans walking around uttering (or muttering) the Shirley MacLaine mantra, "I am God, I am God, I am God", the average of 29% is extraordinary. That so many of the populations of two predominantly Catholic countries, Portugal and Italy, select the "God within" option is even more extraordinary. How can one be a Catholic and believe that "God is something within each person, *rather than* something out there" (emphasis added)?

Equally arresting is that in six of the eleven countries percentages for the option "God within" are higher than percentages for the item "personal god". In descending order of percentage difference, these are shown in Table 2.

If one used the "I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship" questionnaire option as a rough guide to belief in the theistic God of Christianity (and other traditions) and the "God within" questionnaire option as a rough guide for inner-life spirituality, these data *could* be taken as signifying a spiritual revolution of belief in a number of countries. More precisely, *if* it is indeed the case that "God within" responses signal inner-life spirituality, more people 'believe' in this form of the sacred than in the theistic, transcendent God of traditional Christianity. We will, however, argue that things are most probably substantially more complicated than this.

### Interpreting "God Within" Questionnaire Responses

Barker (35) derives four categories from the RAMP data: "religious & spiritual" (37%, the largest of these four categories of European respondents), "religious not spiritual" (15%), "spiritual not religious" (12%), and "neither religious nor spiritual" (35%).<sup>6</sup> Table 3 is based on a re-calculation of the findings provided by Barker (38).<sup>7</sup>

Taking our cue from on Barker's analysis of the somewhat similar table she provides (38–9), it is reasonable to suppose that the more traditional the Christian, the more likely it is for the questionnaire option "I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship" to be selected. It is equally reasonable to suppose that less traditionalised respondents are more likely to select the questionnaire option "I believe in an *impersonal* spirit or life force" (emphasis added), which clearly 'breaks' with orthodox theism (see Houtman and Mascini 462).

The picture which emerges is apparent enough. Whereas "personal God" respondents are clearly over-represented in the "both religious and spiritual

**Table 3.** "Which of these statements comes nearest to your own belief?" by Barker's typology of religiosity and spirituality (in %).

Response option	Neither religious nor spiritual	Religious not spiritual	Spiritual not religious	Both religious and spiritual	Total
Personal God	7	11	1	79	100
Spirit/life force	32	7	31	31	100
God within	31	10	20	38	100
Don't believe	78	1	21	0	100
Don't know	71	3	22	4	100
Total	33	8	17	42	100

category" and whereas "spirit/life force" respondents are clearly over-represented in the "spiritual not religious" category, there is not such a clear pattern for "God within" respondents. Those selecting "God within, rather than without" thus *appear* to be conveying a wider variety of meanings than those selecting either "I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship" or "I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force".

The crucial question is: what is to be made of the "God within, not without" data? Without going too deeply into contextual factors which help inform the task of making sense of questionnaire data, we introduce some interpretative possibilities of the four relevant cells of Table 3 and the terms they are couched in; these possibilities derive from reflections on the evidence presented thus far.

**"God within", while both religious and spiritual.** Bearing in mind that the questionnaire does not allow multiple choices, respondents who select the "God within rather than without" option are not the same individuals who select the first ("personal God") option. Accordingly, it cannot be assumed that the respondents who are categorised as "religious & spiritual" *and* who select the "God within" option are strongly traditionalised. Far from it. After all, they select the "God within" option, not the "personal God" statement which one would expect the typical *orthodox* Christian to select. Our hunch is that the "God within" data of the category under consideration indicate "God within" (and "spirit/life force") forms of spirituality, emphasising immanence as much as, if not more than transcendence; taking the form of a relatively detraditionalised 'Christian' spirituality, with 'all in God' panentheism emphasising immanence, while retaining a measure of theistic 'transcendence'. Above all, we could very well be in the territory of charismatic and other forms of Christianity where the Holy Spirit has become more or less severed from the theistic Godhead, to serve as a relatively autonomous spiritual source lying within the self.<sup>8</sup>

**"God within", while religious, not spiritual.** What is to be made of those who apparently reject the language of spirituality, while apparently believing in the "God within"? One possibility is that a number of respondents are highly orthodox. New-fangled, 'New Agey' language of spirituality is not for them. Yet this possibility is unlikely. If they were that orthodox, they would have selected the "personal God" choice. Another possibility, which could have much to commend it, is that respondents are of an *immanentistic, humanistic* persuasion. The immanentism of Christianity is emphasised; so is the humanistic ethicality characteristic of so much Christianity. Terms like

'spirituality' are not called into play for reasons to do with language use, word associations, socialisation, education, class, etc. The theistic Godhead might very well be retained; more significantly, so might the immanentist strand of Christianity; and perhaps even more significantly, so too might that closely linked, and major, strand of Christian ethicality, the humanistic.

As for the similarities and differences between the "God within, rather than without", respondents allocated to the "both religious & spiritual" and "religious not spiritual" categories, it is likely that (a) other than specific differences in language use, there could be much in common, especially with regard to (relative) detraditionalisation of belief; (b) those attributed to the first category could emphasise the experiential aspects of spirituality (their use of the language of spirituality suggests that they could be embedded in the experiential aspects of, for example, forms of Christianity which are conservative with regard to basic values, but emphasise the indwelling nature and role of the Holy Spirit); and (c) those attributed to the second category tend to emphasise humanistic ethicality. On differences, it can also be kept in mind that the extent to which "religious not spiritual" respondents attach importance to the operation of the Holy Spirit is the extent to which they can be expected to be happy with the term 'spirituality'. Since this does not appear to be the case, it would seem that "God within" respondents are not especially Holy Spirit orientated.

**"God within", while spiritual, not religious.** Turning to respondents attributed to this category who selected the "God within" option, the ground is firmer. Here, 'the religious' is noticeable by its absence in Table 3. More clearly than respondents categorised as 'religious, not spiritual', the presence of what appear to be "God within" beliefs, together with the language of 'the spiritual', suggests that we are in the territory of *inner-life* spirituality and associated ethicality. When 'the religious' is rejected and if this means that 'the transcendent' is more or less rejected correspondingly, the "God within" *has* to be grounded in the immanent (for what else is there?), with the 'mysterious depths' of 'life' being the most plausible—and arguably the only realistic—candidate.

**"God within", while neither religious nor spiritual.** It is far from easy to interpret the profile of 'neither' respondents selecting the "God within" option. A possible resolution of this apparent contradiction is that many respondents are *immanentistic humanists*. The 'god' within 'belief' serves to signal, express, symbolise, emphasise the 'ultimate' value of human life *per se*; the 'god' within serves to flag the humanistic values of the 'good life'. Rather than humanism being thought of in terms of 'religion' (largely 'liberal' Christianity in Europe) or indwelling 'spirituality', it is thought of in terms of (relatively) 'secular' renderings of the ethic of humanity: the ethic, grounded in human life, whose values and institutional modes of implementation are widely abroad in 'secular' culture (Taylor). For our hunch is the respondents under consideration, that many of the ethic of humanity—whether involving quite radically detraditionalised Christianity or the post-traditional/non-traditional—remains underpinned, 'sacralised', by way of inner value(s) of an 'ultimate', albeit 'secular', nature. The respondents, we might say, are indigenous Durkheimians, whose 'sacred' has naturally gravitated to, or grown up with, primary 'human' or 'life' values, serving to express and amplify what really counts in the 'good life'.<sup>9</sup>

## Explanatory Hypotheses

Having introduced some interpretive possibilities and dipped into contextual factors to help support interpretations, a crucial analytical task is to go more deeply into theory, linking various social, cultural, and religious contexts to help explain what "God within, rather than without" questionnaire outcomes might, perhaps 'actually' mean. Of the European respondents considered by Barker, 49% selected questionnaire options which signify *some* degree of commitment to, utility of or happiness with the term 'spirituality' (Barker 36). Indeed, as Table 1 shows, 29% of all the respondents under consideration selected the "God within" option (see also Barker 38). Clearly, far more research of various kinds (together with statistical analysis of questionnaire investigation to date) is required to arrive at a reasonably determinate mapping of the meanings ascribed to the "God within" (etc.) use of language. It is thus with a degree of hesitation that we advance some explanatory hypotheses. They are plausible enough, we think, to justify the efforts required to explore them further.

Given the amount of evidence—from RAMP as well as other sources—which could support the idea, the most obvious hypothesis is that Christianity in Europe is undergoing widespread detraditionalisation, which has to be explained accordingly. It is hardly plausible to argue that Catholic Portugal and Italy have suddenly lurched into the realm of "God within" New Age. A more reasonable explanation of the, respectively, 39% and 36% "God within" findings is that the emphasis of Catholicism in these countries has shifted from the transcendent (and traditionalised immanentism) of long-standing orthodoxy to beliefs more akin to the immanent-cum-humanistic *per se* and that this shift is bound up with more widespread processes. Perhaps the process of detraditionalization plays *the* major role in making sense of the high percentages of "God within" beliefs among Portuguese and Italian respondents. According to RAMP, the percentages of those attending church once a week or more frequently are 27 for Portugal and 33 for Italy—significantly lower figures than in the past. The relative loss of faith in traditional, theistic Catholicism is shown by the fact that only 26% of the Portuguese show belief in a "personal God" (see Table 2).

In contrast, consider Great Britain and Sweden. Here, "God within" figures, respectively 37% and 36%, are almost as high as in Portugal. However, the percentages of those attending church once a week or more frequently, are just 12 and 4 respectively—certainly significantly lower than in the past, and still declining. On these grounds alone it seems that the sacred of Great Britain and Sweden is considerably more detraditionalised than that of Portugal or Italy. Indeed, many of the "God within" beliefs of Great Britain and Sweden could be autonomous, with their own 'motors' of sustenance (see Houtman and Aupers 306 for evidence of "spirituality standing on its own two feet" and Houtman, Mascini and Gels 9 on those who report spirituality without having received much, if any, Christian socialisation).

The numerical configurations and substantive changes of the process of detraditionalisation are clearly bound up with, and can thus be largely explained by, more general socio-cultural change. In Portugal as well as Italy (and even more graphically post-Franco Spain), the theory is that the key



motor of detraditionalisation, with the associated development of much of the “God within” sacrality of the life-in-common, lies with the process of ‘humanisation’.<sup>10</sup> The value ascribed to equality undermines the plausibility of exclusivistic Catholic theism; the value ascribed to freedom undermines the acceptability of regulatory Catholic teachings, to do with (increasingly) ‘private’ life, for example. A massive cultural shift seems underway, which is very much bound up with the humanisation of Catholicism, that is, from an exclusivistic ethicality to an inclusivistic ethicality grounded in the inclusivistic sacrality of life in the here-and-now. Still Catholicism, but now reflecting that strand of Catholic teaching (as emphasised by Pope Jean-Paul II) which meshes with the ever-increasing importance ascribed to the values of the ethic of humanity; to the basic value ascribed to life itself, freedom and equality; to the value suffused legal and quasi-legal apparatus whereby human rights, equality of opportunity, etc. are implemented.

In more northerly zones of Europe, however, the hypothesis is that socio-cultural changes related to humanisation *and* ‘expressivisation’ play pivotal roles in explaining why “God within” beliefs have most probably moved further away from the ‘hold’ of traditional theistic Christianity or have developed autonomously (without much, if any Christian influence), or both, than in southern climes. With both the UK and Sweden having experienced a long history of the institutionalisation and cultural propagation of the ethic of humanity (in particular in egalitarian mode), there is little doubt that exclusivistic forms of Christianity have suffered accordingly.<sup>11</sup> The key, however, surely lies with expressivist, ‘post-materialist’ cultural trends (Inglehart and Welzel). With the notable, and readily explicable, exception of Poland, northern European countries are more post-materialist, expressivistic, quality-of-life orientated than countries like Portugal. With a considerable amount of evidence showing that there is a statistically significant correlation, probably a causal link, between the expressivist orientation and the sacralisation of the inner life (Inglehart and Welzel; Houtman and Aupers), the hypothesis is that the “God within” beliefs of northern Europe are more likely to be of a ‘spiritual, not religious’ variety than those of countries to the south. In other words, the greater cultural significance of the expressivist orientation in northern countries seems bound up with a greater tendency for the “God within” to be associated with a spirituality which *expresses* the ultimates of the ‘authentic’, singular life in the here-and-now. Consequentially, “God within rather than without” spirituality is probably bound up with a tendency for the reported inner God to be other than traditional Christianity, that is, to take the form of inner life, *not* theistic spirituality. The ‘freedom’ value-component of the ethic of humanity is much more likely to be informed by sacralised expressivity in northern Europe. Whereas in countries like Portugal, freedom is significantly more likely to be evaluated *within* the ethic of humanity as a laid down system of transcendently grounded value injunctions or the categoricals of ‘the ought’.

### RAMP and the Spiritual Revolution Claim

Heelas has already argued that it is not possible to use “God within” RAMP data to simply read the numerical significance of non-theistic, inner-life

spirituality (Heelas, "Northern Europe"). Bearing in mind the additional points made in the present context, specific statistical findings of the kind under consideration do not have any one meaning, not even a family resemblance of meanings. It would therefore be unwise to claim that a spiritual revolution of 'belief' has taken place in any of the nations of Europe. Further, the frequently intimate relationship between immanentistic, humanistic forms of detraditionalised Christianity (typically with downplayed transcendent theism) and non-transcendent, non-theistic inner-life spirituality calls for restraint. Given that the former can be associated with the language of "God within" and that the latter typically has a humanistic ethical dimension, it is highly unlikely that there is a clear-cut dividing line. Thus it is difficult to know exactly how the quantification required to assess the spiritual revolution of 'belief hypothesis' can be carried out.<sup>12</sup>

In the light of the data in Table 2 the challenge is to find ways of testing the spiritual revolution hypothesis: that the number of those holding "God within" beliefs of an inner-life nature in countries like Sweden eclipse the number of those holding traditional, theistic, 'personal God' beliefs. To complicate matters further, testing will also have to take into account the number of those selecting the option "I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force", who are pantheistic, monistic, inner-life orientated, rather than believe in some transcendent, markedly authoritative 'Higher Power', astrological realm or 'Spirit World'. Yet it is certain that the spiritual revolution has not occurred in Poland, a country where belief in the 'personal God', predominantly of Catholicism, rests at 63% and in "God within" at 18% and where 54% of the population are regular (weekly or more) church attenders.

Whatever the challenges, the fact remains that 29% of all European RAMP respondents selected the "I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there" option (Table 1), with Barker reporting another 15% selecting the "I believe in an impersonal spirit or life force" choice (38). By selecting these options, rather than the "I believe in a God with whom I can have a personal relationship" questionnaire option (33% according to Barker 38), it is clear that traditional belief, *qua* transcendent theism, has faded as a source of significance and authority—in measure evaporated.

It is obviously of importance to establish the extent to which European countries are moving through phases in the history of the sacred, which demonstrate the decline, perhaps demise, of theistic Christianity; conversely, the rise of post- or non-Christian forms of the sacred generated by their own dynamics. Among other considerations, much policy making depends on the matter, from the educational to the political, in particular, regarding the viability and nature of the multi-cultural.

### **RAMP and the 'Believing without Belonging' Claim**

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Gallup polling organisation in the US highlighted the discrepancy between the number of Americans believing in the God of Christianity and the number attending church on a regular basis. Due to the influence of Grace Davie, in particular, the 'believing without belonging' frame of inquiry has become widely adopted. It has also been subjected to

critical attention. Foremost among critics, Voas and Crockett state that “with the exception of a handful of atheists, Europeans continue to believe in God and to have religious (or at least ‘spiritual’) sensibilities” to argue that the claim “happen[s] to be false” (12). Voas and Crockett concentrate on demonstrating the decline of *religious* belief. With Davie herself agreeing that beliefs of the traditional ‘personal God’ variety have declined, there is nothing controversial about this. “Everyone agrees that religion has lost ground”, write Voas and Crockett (24). What is controversial is their argument that “the only form of BWB [believing without belonging] that is as pervasive as Davie suggests is a vague willingness to suppose that *‘there’s something out there’*” (24, emphasis added). For, as shown in Table 1, 29% of European respondents (37% in Great Britain) selected the questionnaire option “I believe that God is something within each person, *rather than something out there*” (emphasis added). With this apparently explicit rejection of ‘something out there’ in favour of the apparently/possibly/probably ‘belief-full’ or ‘belief-affirmative’ ‘God is something within’, there *could* be something seriously amiss with Voas and Crockett’s argument. It can also be noted that, insofar as Davie and others argue that the orbit of the ‘believers, but not belongers’ consists primarily of Christian beliefs, the extent to which ‘god within, not without’ beliefs have been popular in a number of countries, is the extent to which they, too, are wrong.

This raises problems for the portrayals by Voas and Crockett and Davie of the sacred found in European countries. It also raises problems for those who argue that the sacred as a whole is in decline in this region. For with Barker (35) reporting that just 12% of RAMP European respondents selected the “I don’t believe in any kind of God, spirit or life force” option and just another 10% opting for “I really don’t know what to believe”, relatively few are of an atheist or agnostic disposition. Further, unless we are very much mistaken in our reading of the surveys which have been carried out over the years, the percentages of those who don’t believe in anything or who “really don’t know what to believe” (to use RAMP language) have not grown during the last few decades, at least not to any significant degree (Heelas, “Spiritual Revolution” 361; Voas in Pigott 43). It looks as though Voas and Crockett’s suggestion—that “gains in alternative belief are not sufficient to replace the orthodox losses” (25)—might require amendment.

### *Beyond the Holy Trinity of ‘Believer’, ‘Agnostic’, and ‘Atheist’*

We noted earlier that Voas finds evidence of what he calls ‘fuzzy fidelity’, “an attitude”, as he writes, which is found among “half the population of Britain and similar proportions in other European countries”. Significantly, Barker’s analysis of the European RAMP data shows that “around a third of the respondents” occupy “neutral” positions when it comes to their religious or spiritual self-designations (35) (see Note 7 regarding the two questions). The ‘neutral’ percentage (‘around a third’) is relatively close to the percentage provided by Voas for his finding on the ‘attitude’ of ‘fuzzy fidelity’.

The percentage of ‘neutral’ in Barker’s data probably contains neither many atheists (for they are likely to have made up their minds) nor many of those agnostics who have decided that, on balance, religion or spirituality or both is not really for them. Therefore, those in the ‘neutral’ category almost certainly

contain the 'indifferent' (of the 'cannot be bothered, so I'll tick 4' variety), those who are agnostics in the sense which Thomas Huxley meant when he coined the term (those who suspend judgement in the absence of anything approaching conclusive evidence), and 'fifty-fifty' respondents (those who think they have sufficient evidence to support both sides of the case, meaning that they are literally in 'two minds' about *whether* to think of themselves as a religious or spiritual person or not).

Perhaps more significantly, and certainly more interestingly, those who are 'neutral' (or at least 'almost neutral') are likely to include those who 'apprehend' something to do with the 'sacred' or the ultimates of existence; a 'more' which transcends the mundane, the familiar, the *imperfect*, the secular. This apprehension, sensibility, experience might have a fair degree of plausibility to it. Since what is sensed or apprehended remains mysterious, however, the people under consideration are unlikely to hold 'beliefs'—especially of a propositional kind. Further, those who sense or experience 'the mysterious more', but do not or are unable to engage with it, are unlikely to think of themselves as 'spiritual' or 'religious' enough to select anything other than a 'neutral' option on the response scale. To consider oneself to be a "spiritual person" would appear to require a fair degree of certitude. To have had an experience, taken to be of sacred significance at the time, but which later has a strong 'It was as if it was . . .' feel to it, may not provide such certitude. Neither does the stance of 'I've a *hunch* it *was* of an illuminatory nature'.

Our own strong hunch, to be pursued in the future, is that many of those whom Davie and others conceptualise as 'believing but not belonging' are best not thought of as 'believers' at all. They do not have ('fixed') propositional beliefs; they might not have a sufficiently strong sense of the truth of their sensibilities to 'believe in' anything much, that is in the sense of 'having faith' or 'placing trust' in whatever 'sacrality' might be 'taken' to be. Yet this is not to say that their 'apprehensions'—of what lies 'deep' within the self or nature, of what lies 'beyond' the universe in the case of Einstein—is inevitably lacking in significance for their lives. It is not difficult to find examples from literature, a classic being Musil's *Man without Qualities*, where longing for experiential veracity dominates life—without determinate faith (see Heelas, *Expressive*).

The 'holy trinity' of 'believer', 'agnostic', and 'atheist' is deeply embedded in the psyche of the West. Although questionnaires used by sociologists of religion and others have become more sophisticated, the trinity continues to underpin their 'belief' questions and how they are interpreted by researchers. It would be wonderful to find out more about the extent to which the conditions of (later) modernity are conducive to the situation of *apprehending 'the more' without believing in beliefs*, to having subjective experiences akin to 'believing', when 'believing' is qualified by operating without belief. It is reasonable to suppose that those who have lost belief (propositional and faithful/trusting aspects) in Christianity, who for various reasons *resist* atheism, and who are not indifferent include those who have—minimally—opened their eyes to 'the more', 'the "extra"(-ordinary) dimension beyond the secular', which, with no satisfactory 'answers' being provided by the 'secular frame', they quite naturally look out for (more) (see Taylor). 'God within' 'beliefs' might frequently have to be interpreted accordingly, in the process deconstructing the ways in which RAMP has in effect constructed them as beliefs in the first place.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of this research note has been to roll a lifeboat down RAMP, to speed entry into the refreshingly choppy, albeit rather treacherous waters of current debate, to see what good can come out of it. And this *could* be a great deal: not least focusing our minds on teasing out the ways in which the meanings of the 'God within' is associated with degrees, forms or processes of tradition retention/detraditionalisation as well as other factors, including those which have little, if anything to do with the influence of Christianity.

In some countries, the percentage of respondents who select the "I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there" questionnaire option does not necessarily prompt the conclusion that 'beliefs' associated with inner-life spirituality are numerically very important or more important than the 'personal God' beliefs of mainstream Christianity. Percentages do not entail that a spiritual revolution of belief has taken place. For among other considerations, RAMP findings often seem to indicate that a considerable number of 'God within' respondents are thinking in terms of detraditionalised forms of *Christianity*. Rather than the high percentage of 'God within' belief in Portugal, for instance, being taken to mean that Catholic Portugal has swung into the realm of inner-God 'New Age', the hypothesis is that many are emphasising the immanentist, humanistic, 'decent person' aspects of their Catholicism.

Until we obtain a better idea of the percentage of 'God within' believers who are post-Christian or non-theistic, and of the percentage who retain that measure of theistic authority and significance which justifies counting them as belonging to 'tradition', we do not know whether a spiritual revolution of belief has taken place in different European countries. Until more research outcomes are available, we cannot obtain a clear idea of the extent to which the *believing* of the 'believing without belonging' claim is what is 'left' of Christianity, as it detraditionalises in accord with the internalisation of authority within tradition, *or* of the extent to which 'believing' is to do with the sacrality of the inner life generated by dynamos of change operating in the lives of those beyond Christianity *or* of the extent to which inner-life sacralisation is simultaneously bound up with the detraditionalisation of Christianity and with dynamics which could have little to do with the detraditionalisation process itself.

Whatever its undoubted drawbacks, the RAMP data we have been considering are of very considerable indicative significance. The data do *not* come out of the blue of the random. The "God within, rather than without" findings must *indicate* something. There are methodological problems with RAMP, but that does not prevent cautious reflection on what these findings may 'actually' mean. More than any other national or trans-national surveys of recent decades, RAMP sets, or helps establish, new research agendas.<sup>13</sup>

It is appropriate here to close with suggestions of what might usefully be done, at the concrete, practical level, in the future. We need to avoid the danger of lapsing into literalism by relying on overly strong assumptions about what "God within rather than without" must 'essentially' mean. A first obvious strategy, already deployed to good effect by Houtman and Mascini, is to bring contextual evidence into play by examining whether a particular interpretation of a particular outcome is associated with confirmatory findings from other

questions. Concretely, do "God within" respondents *also* hold other 'beliefs' which are indicative, or expressive, of inner-life spirituality? And so on. Another strategy is to develop more sophisticated questionnaires, which give respondents the opportunity to have much more scope in accurately, or reasonably accurately, translating their 'beliefs'—if that is what they are—into ticks. A linked course of action is to use outcomes as a guide for strategic follow-up interviewing. The most direct, easiest, and reliable route to better understanding is providing respondents with the opportunity to say what *they* have in mind and what they mean.<sup>14</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Another index of the 'middle ground' can be derived from data provided by Lynda Barley. With 25% of Britons believing in a personal God and approximately 68% believing in God, 42% apparently believe in some kind of non-conventional/less than conventional 'God' (Barley 2). 'Religious experience' data are also relevant—around 50% of the adult population of Britain, and rising (Heald; Hay)—as is other evidence, including surveys focusing on CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) where expressivistic, holistic themes are well to the fore.
2. Andrew Greeley provides an illuminating account of the history of RAMP (182–6, 215–6) as well as relevant data from the European Values Study and the International Social Survey Program (see, for example, Table 1.1 and 1.2). Heelas provided RAMP findings, together with other relevant data and discussion in "The Spiritual Revolution of Northern Europe: Personal Beliefs" and *Spiritualities of Life* (see also Dobbelaere and Riis).
3. Our own inquiries, with bi-lingual researchers (including Houtman) helps confirm this.
4. To illustrate output differences, we compare the 'Soul of Britain' survey (Heald) with RAMP. The 'Soul' survey finds 23% of Britons selecting a "something there" option. Introducing the "God within rather than without" option and dropping the "something there" choice, RAMP obviously has nothing to report on the latter. The 37% who chose the "God within rather than without" option appear to have absorbed a fair number of the 23% in the 'Soul' survey who responded "something there". If one changes the options, one changes the reported 'beliefs'! There is also the following point: in contrast to the fact that RAMP's "God within" figure of 37% is indicative of the popularity of the theme of the sacrality of the inner-life *per se*, and thus of *the* major theme of the so-called 'New Age', the 2001 census found that just 906 Britons stated that they were 'New Age' (Petre 5), with only 1,603 identifying with 'pantheism' (Crabtree). To compound matters, it is by no means apparent that there are always (propositional) 'beliefs' to report (Heelas, *Expressive*). Finally, it is highly likely that people often hold contradictory 'beliefs' at much the same time (Heelas, "Conceptualizing").
5. We are awaiting the publication of Voas's analysis of the European Social Survey data to see whether it sheds more light on how RAMP findings are best interpreted (Voas).

6. The four categories are derived from two pivotal questions. These are, in the English versions: "Whether or not you go to church or a place of worship, to what extent would you say that you are a religious person?" and "Whether or not you think of yourself as a religious person, would you say that you have a spiritual life—something that goes beyond just an intellectual or emotional life?" (Barker 32).
7. Unlike the previous two tables, which are derived from the responses of *all* the RAMP respondents, Table 3 is based on a recalculation of data provided by Barker (38). It is important to keep in mind that respondents entering the neutral value of 4 between the extremes of 7 (for the definitely religious or spiritual) and 1 (for the definitely not religious or spiritual) are *not* included in Barker's table (33, 35) nor are they, therefore, in our reworking of her table. It should also be noted that most of the "row" percentages of Table 3 do not add up to exactly 100. This is because the original table contained crude percentages without decimals. Even so, the patterns are clear enough. Many thanks are due to Peter Achterberg (Department of Sociology, Erasmus University) for his invaluable assistance in making the necessary calculations.
8. While interpreting RAMP findings, it is worth bearing in mind that the detraditionalisation spectrum runs from traditional orthodoxy to relatively detraditionalised forms of the sacred—panentheism ("all in God", with God being of an ontological standing to include the all), pantheism ("God is all", with God and the all being identical), etc.—to stances which "believe" in the "God within" while rejecting transcendent theism, and to the realm beyond detraditionalised of the sacred, namely the 'clearly' post-traditional of the secular: most noticeably those who selected the RAMP response option "I don't believe in any kind of God, spirit or life force", who fall into the "neither religious nor spiritual" category. (See also Barker 38–9.) It is also worth bearing in mind that some or many of those ticking the "God within, rather than without" box think of themselves as 'religious' and 'spiritual', without holding propositional beliefs about 'God', instead 'sensing' or 'apprehending' a 'religious/spiritual' dimension (Heelas, *Expressive*). The 'misattribution' to 'belief' possibility applies to the "God within" data of all Barker's categories. On the extent to which the Holy Spirit can serve in a detraditionalised fashion, see Wuthnow.
9. The most clear-cut example of non-traditional, post-traditional, possibly strongly detraditionalised forms of 'spirituality' almost certainly concerns respondents attributed to the 'spiritual, not religious' category, who also selected the questionnaire option "I don't believe in any kind of God, spirit or life force". This must be 'secular' spirituality, with many respondents quite probably drawing on the language of spirituality with regard to 'secular' experiences, such as the 'deep' friendship, the 'moving' aesthetic experience, etc. It is also possible that some reject the language of 'belief', because they associate it with what they take to be the dogmatism of (Christian, etc.) belief; further, they don't think that their 'spiritual' sensibility has anything to do with 'belief'—whether it be of God, spirit or life force couched in terms of the determinate specificity of ontological realism (Heelas, *Expressive*).
10. According to the European Values Survey, the percentage of Spaniards attending weekly service has declined from 43% in 1981 to 25% in 2000. During recent decades, Spain has incontestably become more liberal, humanistic, and, for many, more 'permissive'.
11. Neither is there much doubt that, in measure, "God within" beliefs are used to affirm the values of quite strongly detraditionalised Christianity: the values which are 'left' when people have more or less ceased to believe in transcendent Christian theism; the values which people associate with 'being a good or decent person'; the values which people are prepared to emphasise, or render 'ultimate', by drawing on the language of 'God'; the values which are associated with, in order to exemplify, 'being Swedish' (paradigmatically, in the face of the 'immigrants' of Malmo). On the numerical significance of the humanistic among those describing themselves as 'Christians in their own personal way' in Sweden, see Eva Hamberg (51–3). It is indeed likely that the 'humanistic', in exclusivistic mode, is often bound up with the nationalistic, when to be a 'good person' is 'to be human' according to indwelling national tradition; is to 'make' the difference in the light of perceived threats to national 'identity'. In exclusivistic mode, Catholicism in Italy, for example, can do a 'good' job in this regard. Arguably having veered towards the more secular, an immanentist 'national' or 'cultural spirituality' could well be quite strongly in evidence.
12. The criteria used in *The Spiritual Revolution* (Heelas et al. 36–7), together with the in-depth interviews and discussions of the Kendal Project, meant that we could only go some way in addressing this particular problem. However, Heelas would be the first to accept that the 'dividing line' under consideration was sometimes applied in rather arbitrary fashion.

13. Without attempting to be exhaustive, there is, firstly, the matter of ascertaining what exactly is indicated by the "God within" and related data; a more modest aim is ascertaining which of the interpretative possibilities raised by the data are the most plausible. Secondly, taking a more theoretical perspective, there is the matter of going deeper into explaining the detraditionalisation of what are almost certainly great swathes of Christianity (with other traditions, led by Hinduism, no doubt catching up in the future). Thirdly, there is the task of explaining dynamos of change, generating 'God within' and cognate 'beliefs', which operate among those who have never had much of a Christian background, if any (a *formidable* challenge for theory, which has yet to be tackled systematically on the basis of evidence available now, see Houtman and Aupers 305). Finally, there is the matter of explaining why many of those who 'drift' away from more direct forms of contact with Christianity appear to remain content with some form or other of 'belief' in the sacred—rather than becoming atheists. Thinking of the third of these explanatory tasks, in the Netherlands, around half of the 'New Agers' do not have significant Christian backgrounds (Houtman, Mascini and Gels 9). Given that the 'New Age' appears to be equally attractive to those who have never identified with Christianity and to those who have, the non-identified category directs attention to autonomous (with regard to Christianity, that is) motors of change and the identified point to the role played by prior Christian 'priming'. Thinking of the fourth task, Houtman and Aupers note that "research has pointed out that post-traditionalists are *equally likely* to embrace post-Christian spirituality as to reject it along with Christian religion, adopting a basically secularist posture in the process" (316, emphasis added) and emphasise the importance of explaining this. Life for the sociologist of spirituality and religion, today, is thus far from simple.
14. One reason for attaching considerable importance to participant understanding is that it helps avoid the danger of circular argumentation. Circularity is in evidence when questionnaire outcomes are used to make interpretative 'hypotheses' about the same outcomes. There is also the danger of deploying contextual evidence of taking "God within rather than without" responses to mean just that, because they are found among those who are of an expressivistic, inner-self orientated persuasion, for example. Clearly, to use cultural context (for instance the expressivistic) to interpret 'belief'—to explain 'belief' accordingly—is to fall into the trap so emphasised by Peter Winch in *The Idea of a Social Science*.

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