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RETHINKING THEOLOGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A COMPARISON OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD BY
RICHARD HOLLOWAY, ROWAN WILLIAMS AND SLAVOJ
ŽIŽEK

BACHELOR THESIS

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Prohlášení:

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto Bakalářskou práci „Rethinking Theology in the 21st Century: A Comparison of the Theology of the World by Richard Holloway, Rowan Williams and Slavoj Žižek” napsala samostatně a výhradně s použitím uvedených pramenů.

Souhlasím s tím, aby byla zpřístupněna veřejnosti ke studijním účelům.

V Londýně dne 8. května 2007


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Abstract

In the 21st century we lost the previously common view of the world – we no longer seem to understand ourselves nor have a consensus on values we have in common in our society. Our views of the world and ourselves are fragmented. Anglican theologians Richard Holloway, Rowan Williams and a Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek question our fragmented reality and identify reasons for the confusion over the role of freedom and choice, love and charities, remorse and forgiveness and self-understanding in our society. In their theology of the world they identify a phenomenon they call either a 'social miracle', an ultimate forgiveness or *agape* that seems to provide an overarching force bringing together the fragments of our lives and connecting us with the general condition of humanity – the struggle for wholeness and freedom.

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Anotace

as we thought?

Ve 21. století jsme jako jednotlivci i jako společnost ztratili dříve běžné chápání světa, přirozené porozumění sami sobě a již nesdílíme jako společnost dříve tradiční hodnoty. Náš pohledy na svět a na sebe jako jednotlivce ztratily celistvost – jsou fragmentované. Současní anglikánští teologové Richard Holloway a Rowan Williams a slovinský filosof Slavoj Žižek zkoumají fragmenty naší současné reality a odhalují příčiny našeho nepochopení smyslu svobody a možnosti volby, lásky a charity, lítosti a odpuštění a sebepochopení v dnešní společnosti. Všichni tři v jejich teologii světa identifikují fenomén, který nazývají „sociální zázrak“, naprosté odpuštění nebo *agape*, který přesahuje jednotlivé fragmenty našeho života a stává se silou, která nás spojuje se základní lidskostí – naší úsilím o celistvost a svobodu.

1. Introduction

21 The underlying question of this work is what the theology of the world, based on selected titles of Richard Holloway, Rowan Williams and Slavoj Žižek has in common, what is the unifying and overarching theme and if/how this can answers fundamental questions people in united Europe in 21st century are struggling with.

1.1. Theology in post Modern Europe

120 The societies in the united post-modern Europe are facing ultimately new challenges in the process of identifying and grasping new realities – issues surrounding truly multicultural societies and globalisation resulting in fundamentally changed society values and the loss of a uniformly accepted value framework. Also, we witness confusions over the understanding of ourselves, our role in the society and the impact on the globalised world. Are contemporary leading European philosophers and theologians questioning these issues?

The Western and Eastern Europe united politically and economically after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. However, are the societal issues faced by the post-communist Europe and the former Western Europe still different? Have the different historical and political experiences Eastern and Western Europe have gone through in the second half of the 20th century resulted in a different view of the current secular society? Are the questions of interest to current theology and philosophy still different in the two parts of Europe?

In post-modernity, the way we perceive ourselves and the world has lost the unified values and a shared framework of meanings and roles – all are fragmented. What is holding these partial worlds and islands of insights and outlooks together? Is there overarching principle that can unifying them?

2?? These are the questions addressed in this thesis – Anglican theologian Richard Holloway and Rowan Williams were identified as representatives of the Western contemporary thinking and Slavoj Žižek, a Slovenian philosopher, brings in an Eastern European view.

1.2. Authors and Titles

Three theologians representing current Western and Eastern European views: Richard Holloway and Rowan Williams from the Anglican tradition and Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek were studied.

Richard Holloway, the Bishop of Edinburgh and the retired Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, is known by his decades-lasting successful academic activity in the field of theology and bio-ethic as well as for his very challenging view of Christianity and the role of religion in a secular society in the 21st century. From a long list of publications, three titles were chosen to represent his writings and major standpoints of his theology of the world: *Doubts and Loves*¹, *Godless Morality*² and *On Forgiveness*³. Rowan Williams, the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury, is a remarkable leader of the Church of England. He has published a numerous highly acclaimed titles, including sermons and books of poetry. Two complementary titles were chosen to represent this thinker and his theology of the world. In this thesis, we look at this acclaimed book *Lost Icons – Reflection on Cultural Bereavement*⁴ and *Silence and Honey Cakes – The wisdom of the desert*⁵. Slavoj Žižek is a contemporary Slovenian philosopher, sociologist and cultural critics⁶. A very interesting thinker from the former Eastern Europe, he is able to address issues ranging from cybersex, fantasies and social justice and originally links them to teaching of Hegel, Freud, Lacan and Marx. In this thesis we study his books *On Believe*⁷ and *The Plague of Fantasies*⁸.

1.3. Themes and Methods

Reading the chosen titles by Holloway, Williams and Žižek it was not difficult to observe the closeness of the issues these thinkers address. Obviously, each of them has a different starting point and a different epistemology, however, they are struggling with very similar themes related to our world, society, freedom and ourselves. They all define a unique theology of the world.

¹ Richard Holloway. *Doubts and Loves. What is Left of Christianity*. Canongate. 2001

² Richard Holloway. *Godless Morality – keeping religion out of ethics*. Canongate Books, Edinburgh, 1999

³ Richard Holloway. *On Forgiveness. How can we forgive the unforgivable?* Canongate Books, Edinburgh, 2002

⁴ Archbishop Rowan Williams. *Lost Icons – Reflection on Cultural Bereavement*. Morehouse Publishing, USA, 2000

⁵ Archbishop Rowan Williams. *Silence and Honey Cakes – The wisdom of the desert*. Lion Hudson, Plc., England, 2003

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_Zizek

⁷ Slavoj Žižek. *On Belief. Thinking In Action*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, 2001

⁸ Slavoj Žižek. *The Plague of Fantasies*. Verso, 1997

why these The following methods and research approach were adopted for this thesis: different foundations of the theology of the world were identified in the selected writings by Holloway, Žižek and Williams, however, they all address very similar issues – fragments. The key five fragments were selected and related arguments by Williams, Holloway and Žižek were grouped accordingly – freedom and social responsibility, choices and determination, self and soul, forgiveness, remorse and reconciliation, and finally, love and charity. These were compared to illustrate their commonalities as well as different standpoints of arguments of these thinkers about the five selected themes. Summary of their similarities and differences, the role of the theology of the world as a unifying factor and my observations are discussed at the last chapter.

There are however couple of limitations of this thesis. Conclusions about the actual thinkers were based on seven titles, not on their entire bibliography and without trying to trace their live long theological development by comparing their early writings with those recent ones, studied in this thesis. There is a wider coverage of Williams' and Holloway's outlooks as their themes better meet the focus of this work. Žižek addresses much more diverse spectrum of topics that did not all necessarily fit in the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I am aware of a certain bias towards the Anglican tradition.

2. Introduction to the Theology of the World of Williams, Holloway and Žižek

In this section will be briefly introduce key life achievements of the three thinkers, discuss their key publications and focus on the foundations of their theologies with relevance to this thesis.

2.1. Different Foundations of the Theology of the World

To compare the theology of the world of the three thinkers we need to start with their foundations – starting points. They all seem to address similar topics but there are fundamental differences in their approaches, starting points and an argumentation for their cause.

Firstly, Williams and Holloway represent a traditional British Anglican theological school with well-defined and well-argued points. Their writings and arguments are always supported by excellent reasoning and easy-to-follow argumentation bringing a clearly stated

thought-through conclusions. On the contrary, Žižek picks up ideas from a very diverse sources, schools and thinkers, as it suits him, and uses them to present, sometimes without much justification and argumentation, an original topical relationships, influences and novel outcomes.

Both Žižek and Williams are more concerned with the society and the role of the individual in a social context, either from the charity and social responsibility point of view (Williams) or from the point of view of individual and an interaction between individuals (Žižek). In the selected titles, Christian theology and organised religion are not a main framework for either of them. On the other hand, Richard Holloway anchors his thinking in Christian doctrine, the church and starts his well thought-through argumentations in the cornerstones of Christianity (authority of the Bible, etc.) despite admitting that he is no longer sure whether he can still call himself a Christian.

As we have said, there is little difference in the themes of concern to these three authors, however, they do come from different backgrounds and starting points that are determining their argumentations. This is discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

2.2. Richard Holloway

Richard Holloway, the Bishop of Edinburgh and the retired Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, is one of the leading figures in the contemporary Anglican theology.

2.2.1. Life

Richard Holloway served in a number of church positions before becoming Bishop of Edinburgh in 1986 and the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1992. Having retired in 2000, Holloway has served on the Commission for Human Fertility and Embryology and the Broadcasting Commission. He is a reviewer and writer for the Guardian, Scotsman and Herald newspapers, Times, Independent, a frequent broadcaster on radio and television, and a presenter of several BBC series⁹.

His most recent important academic and church appointments include: Member Broadcasting Standards Commission from 2001, Professor of Divinity, Gresham College, London (1997–2001), Elected Primus, Scottish Episcopal Church (1992), Bishop of Edinburgh (1986), and William Belden Noble lecturer, Harvard University (1985).

⁹ <http://www.westarinstitute.org/Fellows/Holloway/holloway.html>

His numerous involvements in community services include memberships in committees working in the area of social work¹⁰ and the area of literature¹¹. His initiatives in the Church of England and bioethics brought him to the post of the Chair of the International Anglican Family Network (1994–2000) and membership of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (1990–1997) and, in particular, prestigious chairmanship of the BMA Steering Group on Ethics & Genetics in 1995–1998.

2.2.2. Titles and Publications

Throughout his very active life, Richard Holloway published numerous books, newspaper articles and has presented his own television series on BBC. His most acclaimed titles include *Godless Morality* (Canongate 1998) and *Doubts and Loves* (Canongate 2001).

His key areas of interest include rethinking the fundamentals of the Christian faith, ethics and bioethics, courageous insights into painful issues facing current society (forgiveness, morality and ethics, relationships, homosexuality, etc).

We have chosen three of his titles to study in depth in this theses. *Doubts and Loves*, published in 2001, investigates what could be rescued from deconstructed Christian doctrine showing that the challenge of Jesus could remain revolutionary, human and of massive spiritual importance to those searching for the “ultimate concern” in the 21st century. In *Godless Morality*, published in 1999, Holloway looks into religion and ethics – how and why to keep religion out of ethics. He believes that current society cannot rely on totalitarian religious systems of the past incapable of responding to new moral questions and seeks liberal answers in the morally ambiguous world. *On Forgiveness*, published in 2002, brings Holloway’s views of the complex theme of forgiveness. He discusses personal battles and political events such as September the 11th, the conflict in Palestine and Israel, and portrays religion as a vehicle helping us to understand how forgiveness works and how to free us from the binds of the past.

In addition, his highly acclaimed bibliography includes titles such as: *Dancing on the Edge* (1997), *Limping Towards The Sunrise* (1996), *Churches and How to Survive Them* (1994) and others. His book *The Way of the Cross* became The Archbishop of Canterbury’s Lent Book in 1986 and *The Killing* (1984) was the winner of the Winifred Mary Stanford Award.

¹⁰ Holloway served as the Chair of the Refugee Survival Trust (1996–2001), Founder and first Chair: Christian Action Housing Association (Glasgow), Founder and first Chair: Castle Rock Housing Association (Edinburgh) and the Chair of the Lord Provost’s Commission on Social Exclusion in Edinburgh from 1999.

¹¹ In the area of literature, he served as the Chair of Judges Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2002, the chair of Judges Creative Scotland Awards in 2000 and the Chair of Scottish Book Trust since 2000.

2.2.3. Richard Holloway's Theology of the World

Holloway's starting point is Christianity – he dismantles the teaching, with courage he detaches himself from events and outcomes that are against his conscious (Lambeth conference on the role of homosexuals in the Anglican Church in 1997) and argues for application of the fundamental principles cleaned of centuries of church power struggles and calls for action to free individuals and societies.

His theology is profoundly human-centred and pro-life action oriented. His ethics is Christianity-founded but demonstrated a human-centred justification for contemporary morality. He does not hesitate to hold controversial conclusions (supporting homosexual partnerships, legalisation of soft drugs, etc) if these are to deliver “more whole” and happier life to individuals and societies. He firmly believes that our understanding of God is not received ‘such as’ from God but rather it is shaped according to the social, cultural and psychological aspects of individuals and their communities. For this approach, he is often accused of justifying his personal preferences, thus creating God in his own image.

The following citation summarises his teaching: “the enduring value in apocalyptic Christianity is that provided you demythologise it and unshackle it from this notion that there is going to be an irruption from the supernatural into the natural, it's still the most powerful part of theology because it calls us to change the world. The new or apocalyptic world of Jesus is a world we are constantly struggling to bring to pass. A new community is not one that is going to irrupt and land on earth straight from heaven. It's something you have to work for”¹².

2.3. Rowan Williams

Rowan Williams is the current Archbishop of Canterbury, the leader of the Church of England. Throughout his active life Williams has hold a number of academic and Episcopal positions and published numerous titles related to the current issues of Anglican theology and the society. He is known as a wise and diplomatic church leader navigating the church through current turbulent discussions around pressing issues, in particular, the role of homosexual clergy in the Church.

2.3.1. Life

Rowan Douglas Williams was born in Swansea in 1950. He read Theology at Christ's College Cambridge. After research in Oxford (on Christianity in Russia), he spent two years

¹² <http://homepages.which.net/~radical.faith/holloway/sixth%20paradigm.htm>

as a lecturer at Mirfield Theological College near Leeds. From 1977, he spent nine years in academic and parochial work in Cambridge. From 1986-1992, Williams was Professor of Theology at Oxford. He was enthroned as Bishop of Monmouth in 1992 and Archbishop of Wales in 2000. He was elected Archbishop of Canterbury on 23 July 2002 and enthroned in 2003 in Canterbury Cathedral.

He has been involved in various commissions on theology and theological education. He was a member of the Church Schools Review Group led by Lord Dearing and chaired the group that produced the report 'Wales: a Moral Society?'. He is also actively involved in the political life. Recently, he has been one of the high-profile opponents of the War in Iraq. He was to repeat his opposition to American action in October 2002 when he signed a petition against the Iraq War as being against UN ethics and Christian teaching, and 'lowering the threshold of war unacceptably'¹³. Williams is a Fellow of the prestigious British Academy¹⁴.

2.3.2. Titles and Publications

Williams has written a number of books on the history of theology and spirituality and published collections of articles and sermons – as well as two books of poetry.

In this thesis, we investigate two of his titles: *Lost Icons* and *Silence and Honey Cakes*. The main title selected to represent Williams' theology of the world is a highly acclaimed *Lost Icons – Reflection on Cultural Bereavement*, firstly published in 2000, bringing his views on the pressing issues of contemporary culture and the need to give away a number of "icons" tightening up imagination and our thinking about ourselves. This is a very profound comprehensive analysis of our blocked images of childhood, unwillingness to think seriously about remorse and the lost of traditional understanding of self and the role of self in the society. Secondly, *Silence and Honey Cakes – The wisdom of the desert*, published in 2003, looks back at the spirituality of the desert fathers and mothers of the 4th and 5th century and relates this to the search of the current society for meaning, understanding of ourselves and relationships with others. In this almost poetic yet profound book, Williams brings many citations, stories and parables from the theology of the desert fathers and masterfully uses these to reflect on similar issues and questions faced by today's society.

This is an outline bibliography of some of the key works published by R Williams¹⁵: *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), *The Truce of God* (London: Fount, 1983),

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rowan_Williams

¹⁴ <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/about/bio.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/about/pubs.html>

Arius: Heresy and Tradition (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1987; 2nd ed SCM Press, 2001), *Teresa of Avila* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991) and others.

2.3.3. Rowan Williams' Theology of the World

Based on the titles selected for this thesis, Williams is deeply concerned with the society, the role of individuals in the society, marginalisation of those less privileged and the impact of globalisation. His starting point is more phenomenological which gives him a wider set of social and individual topics that he describes and brilliantly analyses, however, except from the "social miracle" phenomenon (discussed in section 3.7) his theology does not present action-oriented answers in the way Richard Holloway does.

Williams's theology is also human-oriented and society-oriented in a similar way as the theology of Holloway. However, in other writings (for example, *Anglican Identities* (2004)) his focus is the Christian doctrine, the analysis of the nature of the Gospel message of acceptance and judgement, understanding of the God and the church's argumentative exploration of the Gospel. This is underpinning his understanding of political life, of peace and of sexual relationships.

2.4. Slavoj Žižek

Slavoj Žižek is a contemporary Slovenian philosopher, sociologist and a cultural critic¹⁶. He is one of the most stimulating thinkers of the former Eastern Europe who is able to blend, with enviable ease, the teaching of Hegel, Lacan and Lenin and find correspondences in Schumann's music, responses to Bosnian war and cybersex. He has published a long list of titles addressing admirable range of subjects.

2.4.1. Life

Born in 1949 in Ljubljana, Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia), Slavoj Žižek received a D.A. (doctorate) in Philosophy in Ljubljana and studied Psychoanalysis at the University of Paris. Currently, Žižek is a senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Chicago, Columbia, Princeton, New School for Social Research, New York, the European Graduate School, the University of Minnesota and the University of Michigan. He is currently the International Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at Birkbeck College, University of London¹⁷.

¹⁶http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_Žižek

¹⁷http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_Žižek#Bibliography

Žižek's early career was hampered by the political environment of 1970s Yugoslavia. In 1975, he was prevented from gaining a post at the University of Ljubljana after his Master's thesis was deemed to be politically suspect. It was not until the 1989 publication of his first book written in English, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, that Žižek achieved international recognition as a major social theorist. Since then, he has continued to develop his status as an intellectual outsider and confrontational maverick.

In 1999 he took an active role in post-communist high politics when he was a candidate for president of the Republic of Slovenia with the party "Liberal Democracy of Slovenia".

2.4.2. Titles and Publications

Žižek published a numerous books on diverse subjects ranging from postmodernity, political issues, the role of self, pseudo-concrete imaginary structuring our lives down to toilet design and cybersex.

Two titles were selected for this thesis. His book, *On Believe*, discusses a range of topics from social justice and political changes in Eastern Europe to the virtual reality and its impact on human self-perception. He addresses the role of Judeo-Christian culture and tradition in our current thinking and gives an original look at Christology. One of his previous books, *The Plague of Fantasies*, brings an inspirational insight into our world of fantasies, dreams, subconscious and outlines the role of current media, films and virtual reality on our thinking and acting.

This is the bibliography by Žižek listing his major recent English titles: *Organs Without Bodies* (2003), *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), *Interrogating the Real* (2005), *The Universal Exception* (2006), *Neighbours and Other Monsters* (2006), *The Parallax View* (2006) and others.

2.4.3. Slavoj Žižek's Theology of the World

Slavoj Žižek is referred to a philosopher rather than a theologian. He has got a strong phenomenological and psychoanalytical background. His approach is very differed to these of Williams and Holloway. Žižek "picks and mixes" from religious traditions, psychoanalysis, philosophical and sociological schools across centuries and has no hesitation to include very contemporary and controversial themes such as cybersex, movies, virtual reality and explicit descriptions of human sexual behaviour. He does not seem to have a direction in a way he builds his argumentations, however, his innovative "connections" are

every original in describing people, our thoughts, fantasies and influences. There is less of an applicability of his thoughts on humans and he does not seem to be too concerned with social and nature issues.

While his range of his subjects is enormous, he often changes his stand on a certain subject, and issues often seem brought together in a rather rushed matter lacking clarity and profound revelations¹⁸.

3. Theology of the World

The key characteristic of the current theology is a *fragmentation*. The themes addressed by all three authors are the *fragments* of our understandings, views, questions and answers related to the Self, the world, the society and the “meanings”. The common framework of understanding of the world has been lost; we have lost our nature self-understanding.

In this theses, I argue that the theology of the world, drawing from selected titles by the three authors, can form a unifying framework for these fragments – it can pull them together, not in order to bring answers to posed questions, but to seek a framework – an overarching principle – setting our fragments to a common context.

In this chapter we discuss the fragmentation, what theology of the world can and cannot offer and devote a great deal of attention to describing the actual fragments – key themes discussed by the three authors.

3.1. Fragmentation

We have lost a common value framework present in various forms in philosophical paradigms of the previous centuries – our understanding of the world and ourselves, social order, gender roles, respect for authorities and common values lost the former natural understandings – there are valid multiple views, the common value framework is fragmented. All three thinkers come to this conclusion.

Williams argues that the absence of these issues shows when people do not know how to “belong” with each other and with their environment. Current confusion over many social issues such as sexuality, gender etc demonstrates then there is no consensus and this is not to appear in a hurry to identify “values” we hold in common¹⁹. He continues by claiming that what makes possible and accepted the music culture, “designed drugs” development, and the “fashion industry” is exactly this confusion over our common values and common good. He argues that the current competitive political environment blind to the true conflict of interest-

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_Zizek

¹⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 4

based values is a product of this confusion. On contrary, to run politics differently, in a non-competitive charitable fashion would not work either, Williams observes, as politics entirely based on “charity” in the sense of egalitarian transcendence, non-competitive communion fails to be a politics at all because it depends on recognising the truth that the non-charitable world habitually deals with – conflict of interest and desire, the unavoidability of loss, the obstinacy of others. We “learn” each other, we come with each other, in the trials and errors, the contests and trials of speech; which takes time, and does not quickly or necessarily yield communication²⁰.

Richard Holloway makes exactly the same observation – the dominant characteristics of what is called post-modernity is the absence of agreement on the core meanings and values that undergrid the human experience – we have no common “meta-narratives” to help us to find an agreement on how to understand and order human communities²¹.

Žižek makes the same observation about lost common values but does not stop with the social side of fragmented world but goes further by describing a decentralisation of the Self – the body and person could be multiple and not at the same place in the virtual world²².

3.2. The Scope of the Theology of the World

The theology of the world is concerned with the *Self* and the *world*. Primarily, it covers the Self, self-understanding, human consciousness, human relationships, the role of humans in the society, ethical choices and life direction-related issues. Secondly, it is concerned with the *world* – the role of the society, the interactions between individuals and groups of the society, social and political justice and the underlying principles enabling and disabling the identified positive and negative principles.

The scope of the theology of the world sometimes includes issues related to the relationship of human to the nature and the cosmos, cosmology, however, neither of the three authors have included these topics in the studied writings. A pastoral theology also is not addressed.

Theology of the world does not include Christology, but is bordering with it. We will see that in particular Holloway and surprisingly Žižek have included the understanding of Christ into their writings. Principles of epistemology, theology of the trinity, salvation, divinity, liturgy nor ecclesiology are the themes outside the scope of the theology of the world.

²⁰ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 70

²¹ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 6. Holloway goes on explaining that here is where our “multicultural” experienced and “plural” values have originated.

²² Žižek. *The Plague of Fantasies*, page 140

We have identified and grouped the key themes of the theology of the world of the three thinkers into five fragments:

1. Freedom and Social Responsibility – Is the level of freedom we experience in current European society leading to more just world?
2. Choices and Determination – Do the numerous choices available to us bring a better self-realisation and an enrichment of our lives and societies or are we actually still determined?
3. Self and Soul – How should we cope with no natural self-understanding and enforced self-definitions causing further alienation of ourselves and social groups?
4. Forgiveness, Remorse and Reconciliation – How can we bridge gaps caused by our personal or society trespasses in a society where forgiveness is misunderstood and remorse almost non-present?
5. Love and Charity – Can we find love and charitable behaviour in our highly competitive societies driven by desires and instant satisfactions?

The theology of the world encompassing these fragments can serve as a unifying framework providing a shared context for the questions asked by citizens of the 21st century Europe. However, it can go as far as questions and outlooks; the scope of the framework does not provide answers nor comparative directions of where to seek answers to the ultimate questions of our lives.

3.3. Freedom and Social Responsibility

Freedom, in its broadest sense, is one of the cornerstones of our society; daily discussed by politicians, journalists, policy makers, healthcare workers, educationalists as well as general public. Freedom has been in an intrinsic nature of European and Northern American cultures in the past centuries; however, the level of freedom we experience today is truly unprecedented in comparison with the control over their lives exercised by previous generations and those living in other parts of the world today. In addition, democracy enables public to influence and have shares in the course of the society. However, does this freedom truly give individuals the desired choices as well as a fair share as citizens of our society? Does this actually enable individuals to run their lives to better meet their needs and fully utilise their skills or is the actual freedom just another form of a social and cultural determination yet skilfully hidden by the omnipresent language of choice? Williams, Holloway and Žižek give this topic a great deal of attention but each addresses different aspects of freedom and its impact on the society.

Holloway starts with the current era of scientific advances allowing humankind to have freedom to shape our own futures and the kind of society we want. It is this aspect of freedom that is potentiality the most frightening to people who are committed, for whatever reasons, and to a fixed understanding of human nature and its possibilities. It is our consciousness and the notion of our history that makes our situation so frightening and so interesting. In the past, societies were a finely articulated system of commands we took for granted, based on an ethic of obedience to authority²³. In the 20th century, the great traditions started to erode and the process of disintegration has now reached a critical stage. Our passion for knowledge has led us to ask questions and dig for the truth beneath the official answers we are given. We also realised the power of market economy that has eroded the old system of power. However, Holloway claims that the strongest factor in the current situation was probably the rejection of authorities²⁴. In *Doubts and Loves*, he continues with giving attention to the impact of the global economy on our society: since 1980s the economical and cultural revolutions have change the social landscape of the West but have a devastating impact upon young, ill-educated workless males forcing destructive behaviour that continually reinforces their alienation. They represent the greatest moral challenge of our time²⁵.

R Williams points out that discussion about the freedom of choices needs chastening by reflection on who is being served by particular models of freedom, as the only way to talk about freedom is to look at the ways power is distributed in actual societies²⁶. The current political language is more concern about short-term advantages rather than about the transformation of human culture²⁷. However, according to Williams, there is a need for a recognition that freedom is about choices but such choices are weighty, bound up with unseen futures for the agent and other agents²⁸.

He further looks at the impact of freedom on the society – lost common values resulted in an erosion of mechanisms controlling rivalry, in particular those little to do with conscious choices and policy. Recognising the choices cannot demand instant fulfilment and there is a necessity of spending time in the management of the conflicts of interests or desire. The interest of the world inhabitants can never be intelligibly considered except by thinking of

²³ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 152

²⁴ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 154

²⁵ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 214

²⁶ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 8

²⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 9

²⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 48. Williams discusses this topics in the context of a parental choice and adult choice versus children's world of justifiable irresponsibility, however, the applicability is universal.

relations. However, to arrive to this point one needs to understand that the self itself is learned and evolved not defined by fixed system of needs and desires²⁹.

Holloway makes the same observation: in our society both tradition and authority are being eroded as command moralities are gradually being replaced by systems of private choices³⁰. Justification have to be offered for modal restrains upon individuals as authorities have not automatic respect³¹. Morality has therefore became creative force developed in conjunction with notions of freedom, choice and responsibility or consequences.

On a similar note, Žižek describes post-modern society by looking back to Heidegger's notion of *Geworfenheit*, of "being-thrown" into a concrete historical situation, which is opposed to the standard humanism and to the Gnostic tradition believing that there is a home, a natural place for man. We can never fully at home in the world, always dislocated which is our constitutive condition, the very horizon of our being³². "Postmodernism", according to Žižek, is the ultimate defeat of the Enlightenment in its very triumph: when the dialectic of enlightenment reaches its dynamic, rootless post-industrial society it directly generates its own "myth". The irony of post-modernity is that at the economic level this is a triumph of the European industry but at the ideological level, Judean-Christian tradition is being threaten by "Western Buddhism" and "Taos" from Asia bringing an ideological supplement allowing psychologically cope with the rhythm of development – things move too fast for us³³. And the capitalist "consumption" – the production and consumption of toys, gadgets which do not satisfy already given need, but create the need they claim to satisfy is only a reaction to a fundamental lack. There is an asymmetrical relationship between of lack and excess³⁴.

Further, what Williams, Holloway and Žižek have in common in addressing the impact of freedom on individuals and society?

Žižek investigates the freedom and how this functions in liberal democracies. Freedom of choice is grounded in the notion that subjects are endowed with propensities they strive to realise. All choices forced upon us, frequent changes to our jobs, healthcare insurance programs etc, require constant decision making that if rejected is seen as inability to participate in "full freedom" – even more, our choices are interpreted as the result of our

²⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 6

³⁰ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 31

³¹ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 33

³² Žižek. *On Belief*, page 9

³³ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 12

³⁴ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 22

personalities, not as the result of us being thrown around by market forces. What is the “formal” and what the “actual” freedom? Žižek argues that conferring the formal freedom of choice does not make any difference: those given the freedom will do the same thing as those (implicitly) denied the choice. For example, Eastern European countries around 1990 were in a position of “freedom of political choice” but they were not really asked what kind of order they wanted. Wild privatisation, the dismantling of the system of social security, etc. were not freely made but enforced by the Western mentors who the Eastern Europeans didn’t want to disappoint³⁵.

Žižek continues that in the name of non-controversy, democracy is more and more a false issue, a notion so discredited by its predominant use. Where, how, by whom are the key decisions concerning global social issues made? Are they made in the public space, through the engaged participation of the majority? If the answer is yes, it is of secondary importance if the state has a one-party system, etc. If the answer is no, it is of secondary importance if we have parliamentary democracy and freedom of individual choice³⁶.

According to R Williams, we live in a society that is paradoxically deeply individualist and deeply conformist. We are fascinated by the power of the individual will and committed to maximising the power enabling individuals to shape their lives through the greatest number of choices. While forgetting how naïve we are about choices and how heavily managed and manipulated this world of maximal choices really is. This leaves the individual with the longing for individuality yet under the pressure to conform; the fascination with the will and the reduction of the will to the choices of the market³⁷.

The belief in the positive value of freedom and choice for individuals could also result in, as Rowan Williams points out, a will’s freedom just affirming itself. As there is no society-defined honour – as a regulating factor for behaviour – nor image of the community to shape and make intelligible their choices, the purchasing and negotiating power to reconstruct themselves are left in an alarming state of emptiness in regard to their identity³⁸. In terms of the impact of freedom on the society, more people are excluded from negotiating important decisions and are left with no stake in their social environment which might lead to the culture of passivity and “victimage” (e.g., a single mother encompasses status of both of a social threat and of an instance of failure in negotiating power and self-determination³⁹).

³⁵ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 121

³⁶ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 123

³⁷ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 52

³⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 101

³⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 102

Holloway adds an important point to the discussion of how far a society freedom should go (on a topics of licensing drugs), that there is the need to protect the freedom of humanity to live life in its own way, provided it is not thereby invading the equal rights of others or damaging their freedoms or interests. We should also make connections between our own customs and preferences and the customs and preferences of others of which we may disapprove for no stronger reason than that they differ from our own. He looks into the society freedom issue from other end of the spectrum and argues for freedom – in open democratic societies, he claims, it is impossible to impose, let alone to police, moral systems that are based on traditional principles that are no longer accepted. That's why there is more than an element of force in the current debate about sex and drugs in our society⁴⁰.

Žižek believes that in a free society, the extremes are inevitable – the moral majority fundamentalists and tolerant multiculturalists are the two sides of the same coin, they both share the fascination with the Other. In moral majority, this fascination displays the envious hatred of the Other's excessive joy, while the multiculturalist tolerance of the Other's Otherness is more twisted than it may appear – it is sustained by a secret desire for the Other to remain "other", not to become too much like us.

Finally, I believe that the relative ease of life enabled by the degree of freedom in current society underpinned by the economic power of western European and North American citizens enabled the notion of an instant fulfilment of needs with no investment and rejection of responsibilities.

Williams addresses this issue as "the lost difficulty of life": he claims that "no-one has ever learned or achieved anything worth having without being stretched beyond themselves, till their bones crack"⁴¹. He also investigates this phenomenon on the younger generation: deeply and self-consciously anchored in the separate identity of mostly under 25s in the musical and social style of one sector of society, largely untouched in terms of family and working commitments they enjoy so called "corporate patriotism of youth"⁴². Williams believes that this is the result of the inability to share their identities in other ways, in the traditional ways represented by early and lasting sexual bonding and early entry into what once was probably a lifetime job⁴³. This is a result of the current notion of "adult"

⁴⁰ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 107

⁴¹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 149

⁴² Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 67

⁴³ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 68

childhood⁴⁴ – youth wants to reclaim the space of play whose boundaries have been violated. But the refusal to learn the language of cost and ambiguity in facts lands you in a vulnerable position: others will be making decisions in another language; in language they have no share, and therefore, cannot be participants⁴⁵.

Holloway looks back to religious narratives and stories of struggle for freedom in the Bible – the common denominator that speaks to us today on the theme of our struggle to wholeness and freedom is that there are no easy routes to personal wholeness and human freedom – there might be therapy and counselling programmes, prayer and reassurances, but there is no shortcut through the dry lands of effort. Growth is a cumulative process – no one gets it easy or no one of any complexity⁴⁶.

3.4. Choices and Determination

One of the key expression of freedom is the availability of choices enabling us to take better control over our lives, steer the society and local communities to further enrich our life. All authors investigate this issue in conjunction with personal and society freedom and look into what lies underneath the ever-popular language of choice.

Rowan Williams summarises the difficulties of having choices and making decisions: “real” choices both express and limit freedom; if we are encouraged to ignore the elements of limit, the limiting of myself and, just as importantly, the limiting and determining of someone else’s horizon, we end up in fantasy or confusion or both⁴⁷. But we don’t want to know how our choices make a difference⁴⁸.

On contrary, Richard Holloway in *Godless Morality* criticises the other extreme, still very much present the Christian Church – rejection of choices and slavish following and promoting absolutist values. He stands against the fundamentalists as culturally and sociality-dependent values of previous paradigms have no hold over the present. The reason might be that people find it difficult to live in moral ambiguity, but mature people try to live with contradiction rather than insisting on neat resolutions⁴⁹. However, he claims that those

⁴⁴ See section on choice – Williams gives a great deal of attention to understanding the role of childhood in our society and the impact of the early enforced adult responsibility on children. See section 3.4

⁴⁵ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 69

⁴⁶ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 78

⁴⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 37

⁴⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 38

⁴⁹ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 16

in the secular society have asserted their own moral reasoning as a higher value than the simple acceptance of the alleged claims of the divinity⁵⁰.

Žižek argues for the same point about choices and enforced decision making, he discusses the forced choices bombarding us to choice options when doing on-line shopping, choosing your sexual orientation or forcing citizens to choose your nationality in a post Yugoslavian society (Serbs or Croats) completely excludes the basic, authentic human choice, the *choice itself*⁵¹.

Authors elaborate of the theme of choice and enforced decision making further, each brining different examples. For Williams, this topic is closely connected with the notion of childhood and education, Holloway looks at choice of religion and Žižek investigates the role of money in this context.

One of the key subjects for R Williams to demonstrate the false language of choice is childhood and the parental choice of education for their children and the role of *children-oriented marketing* pretending we have choices but in reality taking them from us by enforcing uniformity marketed as “trendiness”. More specifically, Williams argues that one of the key problems is making a sense of “childhood” in our culture – without that there is no chance to have a coherent idea of what our education might be, what “choices” really are. However, to look at the child as economic and sexual consumer, as Williams claims our society does, is to flatten the landscape of our own adulthood, to make a universal model of choice that is at best partial and trivial, and also to treat the child as a market rival⁵². The point is that children are to be free of making mature adult choices and commitments if they are to learn how to make adult choices, childhood is a period of learning to choose⁵³. Current Western culture lost the notion of this latent period of childhood by enforcing education into pressing children into adults as fast as we can⁵⁴. Williams argues that children are accepted to produce legitimately irresponsible talking, this learning should not be paralysed by the fear of making mistakes, fantasizing. Fantasy books and children literature teach children to think what aspects of persons, objects are the same in a different fairytale and fantasy realities and what issues of this world are those non-negotiable⁵⁵. However, it is the responsibility of an adult in keeping the bounds of this playful world that is so crucial⁵⁶.

⁵⁰ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 8

⁵¹ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 28

⁵² Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 48

⁵³ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 27

⁵⁴ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 12

⁵⁵ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 19

⁵⁶ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 21

Therefore, it is important to understand what “subject” our culture believes a child is, continues Williams. Now, a child is considered as a consumer – a purchaser of goods designed to stimulate further consumer desires⁵⁷. All advertising tends to treat public as children – pretending that decisions can be made without cost and risk⁵⁸, however adults can understand the forces behind while a child cannot. A child is not only an economic object but also a sexual object – whole body becomes a gives and receives of messages and sexual marketing is rather like economic presenting the issue as risk-free. Marketing is always full of erotic idioms – good are desirable to make you desirable, the stereotypes of predatory male and seductive female are happily exploited and thought to be rather touching in children of six to eight years. Plus everywhere where the idea of fashion and desirability is fostered in the child⁵⁹. The pressure on the child to be a sexual object causes the problem of children not learning how sexual choices are learned and made, how consciously and in what context. Children should learn their identities at a safeguarded space before commitments are to be made⁶⁰.

Holloway presents a similar argument about current “choice” of religion that has become an equal commodity. Probably, the most blatant exponents of religious consumerism are North American television evangelists, the best of whom are brilliant salespersons. However, he seems this move as positive, we appreciate the fact there is no universally accepted answer to the question posed by our ultimate concern⁶¹.

Žižek is more radical about the role of money in our society – he emphasises that in the capitalist society inter-subjective relations are mediated by money. For example, he claims that even psychoanalysts are getting paid for “not getting involved in the passions generated the patient’s pathology”. Thus psychoanalyst is effectively a kind of “prostitute of the mind” getting money for the same reason prostitutes get paid so as they don’t have to get personally involved, can keep distance. This is, according to Žižek, the function of money at its purest. Similarly, Jewish community demanding money for their suffering in the Holocaust so as the perpetrators can pay the debt and buy their peace, however, this doesn’t relieve us from the guilt rather acknowledges this guilt as indelible⁶².

⁵⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 22

⁵⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 23

⁵⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 25

⁶⁰ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 26

⁶¹ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 6

⁶² Žižek. *On Belief*, page 18

On this account, Williams argues that the belief in maximising choices in our society when it comes down to education is false, in particular the emphasises on “parental choice”. Parents are given the choice to choose a better education for their children, therefore, putting pressure on schools to score well in the performance-oriented league tables. However, parents wanting to send their children in to say multi-ethnic schools less successful according to the academic criteria will equip them with better understanding and social skills in today’s society might jeopardise a child’s possible professional future. If education system is understood as a market then a school competes with another schools by the capacity to attract customers away from competition, selecting more successful application, that includes attracting parents with managerial and fundraising skills etc. that further hampers not so successful schools and therefore the choice is not more than a gesture⁶³. As a result some schools and parents are without a choice because the resources are deployed in one direction by imposing uniform standards of excellence.

Finally, Williams continues that since we currently don’t seem to know, as a society, what we want to “induct” children into and what we consider to be the foundation of our society’s moral legitimacy, it isn’t surprising that we take refuge in treating education as the process of purchasing blocks of training material, where the “moral education” block is even less weak, not considering the need for children to learn the language in which it can think about its society – to understand its traditions and to challenge its inconsistencies⁶⁴.

Holloway on this account confirms that human freedom of choice, however irrational, is an important value if it does not clash with other even more important values. “Deciding” means cutting through, rather than painstakingly unrevealing, a tangled knot. One way of dealing with moral complexities is to opt for a system that let it decide for us so our act of submission to a particular system removes moral uncertainty from our lies by transferring it to external authority whose judgements we obey⁶⁵.

Further in the context of choice, Holloway investigates the role of virtues – way of finding the balance between two extremes of a good thing. Virtuous person lives a balanced life, making the right choices. For example, courage is a foundation virtue, the mean between cowardice and rashness⁶⁶.

To summarise, the language of choice is false – as Williams explained in the context of education, there is no real choice, parental interest are often being albeit through the child⁶⁷.

⁶³ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 34

⁶⁴ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 36

⁶⁵ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 74

⁶⁶ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 95

⁶⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 37

Education is just one of the examples of the debate of choices where almost universal reduction of agent to consumer, similar to cable television, and consumerising of primary healthcare⁶⁸.

Žižek adds even more radically that the basic characteristic of today's "post-modern" subject is exact opposite of the free subject who experienced himself as ultimately responsible for his fate. No, every contact with another being is seen as a threat – the logic of victimisation is today universalised, reaching well beyond the standard cases of sexual or racist harassment. For example, he refers to recent demands on tobacco industry, claims from the Holocaust victims and forced labourers in Nazi Germany. Therefore, today's predominant form of individuality, the self-centred assertion of the psychological subject paradoxically overlaps with the perception of oneself as a victim of circumstances⁶⁹.

3.5. Self and Soul

All three authors give a great deal of attention in their theologies of the world to the Self and the lost of understanding and referring to self. In this section we investigate their arguments related to this theme.

Žižek believes that the postmodern Self is deconstructed: 'depriving the Self of any substantial content ends in radical subjectivisation, in the loss of the firm objective reality itself'⁷⁰. He further addresses the inability to accept the true reality and the Self in the Western culture and discusses a phenomenon called "Western Buddhism" as one of the very popular "escapes" in the West. Interest in Eastern religions could enable the individual to fully participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist game while sustaining the perception that you are not really in it, believing in the peace of the inner Self to which one can always withdraw⁷¹. He also looks at the new phenomenon, the cyberspace, in relation to the Self. We can experience the Self liberated from the attachment to its natural body.⁷² As we still feel any kind of experience available at cyberspace as "reality", ontological reality, how do we experience our cyber-body⁷³? In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Žižek discusses cyberspace, citing Bill Gates, as a "friction-free capitalism" – the fantasy of a wholly transparent, eternal medium of exchange in which the last trace of material inertia vanishes. In the fantasy of "friction-free capitalism" does not refer only to material obstacles, but above all, to the Real

⁶⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 38

⁶⁹ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 124

⁷⁰ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 26

⁷¹ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 15

⁷² Žižek. *On Belief*, page 33

⁷³ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 54

of the traumatic social antagonisms, power relations, which brand the space of social exchange with a pathological twist. The Internet is seen as self-evolving “organism” where the distinction of culture and nature is blurred⁷⁴.

Holloway has a wider focus - in *Doubts and Loves* he argues what the most characterises us as humans is our consciousness, our ability to think about ourselves. We were thrown into life with no procedural manual supplied, so we are trying to figure out who we are – dual creatures, bifurcated into reason and sense, ideal and appetite, body and soul⁷⁵. Holloway further discusses that in the past main characteristics of our moral decision making was obedience to the commands of the authority, while now it is consent of our reason and emotion⁷⁶. But is it always easy to achieve consent? Holloway continues on the human dilemma that we stumble between excess and deprivation of our self-management. We are animals longing for indiscriminating satisfaction of our natural impulses but the mystery of consciousness has brought awareness of our condition to us, and we have learnt to build hedged against our own appetites. But, according to Holloway, we pay price in self-consciousness and the stifling of spontaneity; we shuttle between sins of indulgence and sins of the spirit. We crucify what we fear, we condemn in others what we most mistrust in our own hearts. This dance between fascination and fear is an ancient theme in religious systems that have always been of great importance in societies. What Holloway calls for is the idea of human life that recognises the goodness of both passion and order and would follow a pattern of controlled passion through self-knowledge of our own desires and speak these honestly in the heart. Jesus’ vision, however, Holloway believes was taking this further, it wasn’t just about personal integration; it was about social honesty and justice⁷⁷.

Rowan Williams starts by highlighting the lost icons in our culture – lost shared understanding of self relates to the loss of society values, languages and communication signals. An important factor in the loss of self-understanding leading to misunderstandings in the current culture, according to Williams, is the loss of common signals, shared language and gestures we use to describe ourselves and communicate self to others. He gives an example of this in-depth confusion caused by the loss of “codes” in the area of sex. Sexual trust like any other trust disappears if both choose what their body should mean – at this level of individualism, we are left alone without an other of any kind to engage with⁷⁸.

⁷⁴ Žižek. *The Plague of Fantasies*, page 157

⁷⁵ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 20

⁷⁶ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 157

⁷⁷ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 196

⁷⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 171

Žižek and Holloway also discuss the relationship of sex to Self. Žižek relates this to the process of atomisation and desublimation – in our “disenchanted” permissive world, sexuality is reduced to an apathetic participation in collective orgies, such as in Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Atomised*. In today’s permissive society, transgression itself is the norm so any “prohibited” Romeo and Juliet-like transgressive erotic passionate relationships will not appear. Žižek cites Lacan who defines in this context a term “sublimation” which is the magic combination of the two dimensions – when the sublime dimension transpires through the utmost common details of everyday shared life – the “sublime” moment of the love occurs when the magic dimension transpires even in common everyday acts like washing the dishes⁷⁹.

Further to the topic of sex, Holloway, on the other hands, expresses the need to see sex as a contextual act that cannot be judged by moral imperatives⁸⁰ and brings arguments for a new way of looking on human sexuality contradicting the traditional church values and teachings. In most cultures sex is morally neutral, in Christianity it was linked with a sin drawing from the Gnostics teaching⁸¹, however, the old teaching no longer holds as it is judged by the same moral principles as any other act. Holloway distinguishes the functional body-satisfying shagging of the 90s generation from relationships that create a bond that opens each person to the possibility of injury or harm as a result of the conduct of the other. However, even most current generation teenagers believe that infidelity is wrong because it hurts, while shagging is not as there is no bond that can be broken. In his view, current sexual love and its discipline of faithfulness, while the relationship endures, could be seen as a contemporary version of the traditional ethic of marriage operating in the apparently chaotic culture of youth sexuality⁸². On same-sex relationships subject, Holloway supports the cause by emphasising that it is important to have a moral force independent of its scriptural context. It is fascinating and in his view very disappointing that campaigners for equal rights for gay and lesbians were fought by society in large rather than within the Christian Church⁸³.

So how can we make any sense of the confused understanding of ourselves, our bodies and our relationships with others? Williams gives this topic a great deal of attention and brings a novel and profound insights into two moments defining our self awareness (conflict and love) and his notion of the soul.

⁷⁹ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 41

⁸⁰ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 62

⁸¹ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 57

⁸² Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 61

⁸³ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 85

Williams brings a profound insight into the self-understanding and describes two exceptional experiences that make us fully aware of Self. The process of making a self by constructing a story that is always being retold is a prosaic and universal one, so much so that we habitually don't notice that it's what we are doing – but there are two moments that bring us to an awareness of what we are doing and it heightens self-consciousness – the first is *conflict or frustration*; the second is *love*.

He means the process of “defining conflicts”, those that provoke sufficient interrogation to generate a new way of speaking, of articulating a position. The self (soul in William's language⁸⁴) is what happens in the process of such attention: it is a movement that begins whenever man experiences the psychological pain of contradiction. This is habitually expected to be eased or removed. But the critical importance of working through transference lies in the handling of the frustration, the sense of betrayal, experienced when the analyst refuses to tell me or give me what I want⁸⁵. Self is what is coming to birth in the process of experiencing frustrated desire. My ‘health’ is in the thinking or sensing of how *I am not at one with myself*, existing as I do in time (change) and language (exchange)⁸⁶.

The second moment of the experience of our self is being in love (sharing life, not an object of a desire) – “being in love” enables the subject to see himself or herself afresh. Both partners in love long to find a way of expressing and discovering truth, because they have been given a kind of promise: the possibility opened up by the fact that I am not only physically desirable to another, but someone that another person wants to spend time with – it makes me feel I am interesting. This mutual exposure in falling in love is a response to the conviction that there is fully and unequivocally “room” for me in someone else's consciousness and affections. However, this two-fold process hovering between egoism and self-denial is very instable⁸⁷.

What is lost in the current communication chaos that leads to the loss of self and misunderstandings in our communication with others is what Williams calls the *soul*⁸⁸. This is, according to Williams, an existence of a non-material element in the human constitution. “Soul” is the religious style of talking about selfhood, while the secular language for the “self” could be treated as soul, however, this could be difficult simplification. The religious language of soul has invented the story of soul living apart of the body and kept this alive is not challenging the core concept. However, some psychoanalytic theories engage in making sense of the self formed in response not simply to the contingent other, but to an Other which

⁸⁴ Williams is using the religious word “soul” for the secular term “self” – the definition and difference could be found later in this section.

⁸⁵ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 150

⁸⁶ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 151

⁸⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 157

⁸⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 160

might be fictive or empty, or not, depending on many variables and factors⁸⁹. Souls, Williams continues, *occurs when trust of certain kind occurs*, when we are willing to invite “non existent other”, not reduce our will to what I want or need. It belongs within a discourse about what is made possible in relations between persons, yet does not reduce to an account of transaction between two desiring egos. For any self to be free to enable another’s freedom means that it must be in some way aware of the actuality not only the possibility of a regard beyond desire – and see its own being as a proper cause of joy, as a gift.

Williams explains how religions handle this differently – Buddhism dissolves the whole idea of a substantial self by dissolving the desires and reactions. Jewish and Christians traditions seek of a personal agency without need or desire “image of God” – all religions have in common that these agents do not deliver the possibilities of a freedom or security for the self that decisively breaks through anxiety, rivalry and exploitation. This is something that lays outside the world of negotiation, that makes possible the festal abrogation of rivalry, the “social miracle”⁹⁰. Therefore, the three religions ground this in the worship of a god who can’t be negotiated with, who has no interests to defend and whose creative activity is therefore pure gratuity⁹¹. These religions also give a pivotal place in their language to gratitude – the acknowledgment that I am acted on before I act or can act (there is no “envy” in the divine⁹²).

Holloway has got a similar point: our understanding has been struggling intellectually or psychologically with abstract issues, such as, can women be ordained? But what is going on inside us? We can all testify moments of conversion, moments when we “saw” thing differently – how racist or sexist we were (conflict) or those moments of love or wonder (love). The depth and richness of our own unconscious from which insights and challenges emerge into our minds is the source of our greatest insights. The revelations of our religious imagination are among the most powerful of our creations⁹³.

So why is this all currently inaccessible? How could we rediscover this self-understanding, self-expression and a shared communication language?

Williams refers to holiness – or wholeness as called today – that requires a degree of inner and outer peace that respects the at times conflicting, though not contradictory, demands of

⁸⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 7

⁹⁰ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 161

⁹¹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 162

⁹² Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 182

⁹³ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 44

body, mind and spirit⁹⁴. He also adds that whether it is a matter of persuading someone to admit what they have never admitted or of helping them to face mercifully what they have admitted, the goal is reconciliation with God by way of this combination of truth and mercy⁹⁵. The only way in which you know the seriousness of separation from god is in your own experience of yourself⁹⁶. In *Silence and Honey Cakes*, Williams looks into the self-understanding from the perspective of the desert fathers. He discusses how difficult honest self-expression is, as this requires self-scrutiny and self-abandonment. Your surface ideas have to go; and so must your will, he claims, the use of the will is simply to keep you at it – but it doesn't deliver the product, because you don't yet know what you most truthfully want⁹⁷.

Regarding exercising choices in the modern world sense and the notion of self, Williams refers to Vladimir Lossky who in his theology distinguishes between the individual – the abstract example of human nature - and the person who is utterly unique defined by the unique intersection of the relationships in which it's involved. According to Lossky's distinctions, it's the individual being rather than the truly personal who makes the choices – that are just one way of expression of human wanting but this is not that constitutes us as persons. We might say that mature human being is not the one who has the most choices but who makes fewest choices, who freely does what he or she is⁹⁸. He argues that the kind of being you makes you want certain kind of things, therefore, making choices is in a way 'natural' activity. So the kind of *persons* whose moral and spiritual integrity has mattered to us and made a difference to us are probably those for whom, to some extent, it is "natural" what they do; they began to change the human nature they live in⁹⁹. Therefore, a community of mere individuals is a place where egos are jostling for advantage and competing for much the same goods, held together by a reluctantly accepted set of rules to limit the damage, while a community of persons is a place for distinctive vocations to the discovered in such as way that they are a source of mutual enrichment and delight, not threat; place where human difference is nourished. There is diversity in respect of races, cultures, personal gifts and plenty of bizarre characters¹⁰⁰.

What is required, to summarize Williams' account, is a vulnerability to each other that can only come with the building up of trust over time. We don't know what we shall be but we

⁹⁴ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 11

⁹⁵ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 28

⁹⁶ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 30

⁹⁷ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 47

⁹⁸ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 54

⁹⁹ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 56

¹⁰⁰ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 58

can continue to question our own (and other people's) preference for the heavy burden of self-justification or self-creation and weep for our reluctance to become persons¹⁰¹.

Finally, it could also be the need to "do" things that keeps us from dealing with our own problems, as Williams refers to, drawing from the monks tradition, it's your boredom, your fear of yourself that we need to encounter and "stay with" in order to resolve¹⁰². Trying not to act as if the problem of myself will just go away or solve itself or get solved by a new environment is the toughest challenge of "spirituality" requiring the quiet motivation to keep our eyes open¹⁰³. In other words, continues Williams, there is always the confrontation with the challenge of being pledged to uncomfortable reality – how we cope with the inner restlessness with constantly suggest what look like simpler solutions, avoiding the difficult route of changing myself. However, when we begin to discover contemplative faithfulness, we recognise that very occasionally around an unexpected corner or with an unexpected person we catch the "glimpse of the fire"¹⁰⁴.

3.6. Forgiveness, Remorse and Reconciliation

All authors identify forgiveness and remorse as another fragment of our world that has lost its original meaning and place as an essential component on the journey to better understanding ourselves and more wisely managing our relationships. Holloway and Williams lead the discourse on this issue, at Žižek's writings this topic is not greatly covered.

Going back to the history of human society and understanding of ethical principles, Holloway identifies the crucial period of 800 to 200 BC when, in all human civilisations in parallel, prophetic figures appeared and challenged the invincible power oppressing the weak – the birth of ethical monotheism. Humanity discovered the righteous God – regardless whether the insight came from God through the prophets to humanity or from humanity itself through prophets who taught it came from God, the fact is, it came. We invented or discovered conscience. Holloway continues that the emergence of conscious, reflective consciousness and the birth of moral struggle see, to be the result of humanity's sundering from its animal past¹⁰⁵. It would not be so painful if the process also brought moral power to choose the good, but that does not seem to be our experience¹⁰⁶. Therefore, the fact and remembrance of our own failures, those acts that can never be undone or reversed or being a

¹⁰¹ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 60

¹⁰² Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 87

¹⁰³ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 89

¹⁰⁴ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 98

¹⁰⁵ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 27

¹⁰⁶ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 28

victim of someone else's evil act can be immobilising – have the power to close off the future and stop out life. He cites Hannah Arendt who meditated on how the past has the power to deny us the future, by imprisoning us in our own irreversible actions¹⁰⁷.

One of the ways dealing with this unbearable feel of failure is ignoring it as we do not know how to deal with it. Williams relates this issue to the loss of remorse in our culture. He links this to the public power of celebrities who never have to say “sorry”, “unaccountable” behaviour is linked with individual scandals of sexual and financial nature. Public want to know more than decades ago and the power of the omnipresent professional image-managers – the iconographers of the media culture - is a response¹⁰⁸.

This has, in his view, a strong connection to the *loss of honour* in our society. This may result from accepting without protest a failure on someone else's part to give you what is owed to you, or from a failure on your own part to conform to what might rightly be expected of you¹⁰⁹ leading to the feeling that you cannot respect yourself. Honour recognises systems of recognition, grounds upon which conversation can proceed. It is tempting in our environment to misunderstand this dependency on how I am seen as a sign of individual weakness, as if it were always the mark of an unhealthy lack of proper self-regard. However, in societies where honour is significant, self-regard is learning through being-in-society and shame is a real restriction on what I am able to think and feel about myself as much as others think of me, say to me and understand about me¹¹⁰. On contrary, Williams continues, in our culture, I believe that I am always able to choose to construct a worthwhile picture of my existence; and in this sense I should be invulnerable to that enormous investment of my identity in connectedness with others that is typical of a society oriented towards honour¹¹¹.

Williams brings together the topics of soul and the belonging to the society in grasping remorse. Soul by reflecting on remorse, honour and shame, as these are of our human experience and discourse, are unintelligible except on the assumption that my part, my publicly identifiable history, the story that can be told of me does not belong exclusively to

¹⁰⁷ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 34-5. Arendt says “Though we don't know what we are doing when we are acting, we have no possibility ever to undo what we have done. Action processes are not only unpredictable; they are also irreversible. The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility is the faculty of forgiving, and the remedy for unpredictability is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises. The two remedies belong together: forgiving relates to the past and serves to undo its deeds, while binding oneself through promises serves to set up in the ocean of future uncertainty islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would ever be possible in the relationships between men. Forgiving and making promises are like control mechanism built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes”.

¹⁰⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 96

¹⁰⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 98

¹¹⁰ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 99

¹¹¹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 100

me¹¹². For example, humankind experienced this during some major political changes, such as in Germany 1945, at the collapse of the apartheid in South Africa in 1991-2, after wars in Northern Ireland and Rwanda – suddenly, no-one admitted they supported the old order; people reinvented themselves and shifted the blame to others. Denial and refusal of remorse represents a protest against the inexorable conclusion that my past is not under my control¹¹³. However, ignoring past prevents reconciliation, the other part of remorse – we need to find common language to share the grief and a path to redemption. There is no hope without remorse as imagining my identity through the ways in which I have become part of the self-representation of others¹¹⁴.

What is needed, continues Williams, is rediscovering remorse – finding the capacity of a culture to leave room for the non-heroic, to celebrate the vulnerable and even comic¹¹⁵. The self without remorse and notion of history and belonging to the society is making choices without inner consequences¹¹⁶. Though “remorse” discovering a vocabulary to allow us to speak about crimes like genocide in Rwanda or holocaust¹¹⁷. Williams believes are we still capable of seeing failure or betrayal as inner and personal wounds, injuries to a person’s substance¹¹⁸.

Remorse is closely very linked to our notion of religious topics of repentance and sins. Williams in *Silence and Honey Cakes* refers to St Augustine who when faced with Pelagian teachers who insisted that all sin was a fully conscious rejection of God said “most sins are committed by people weeping and groaning”¹¹⁹. Also, Williams investigates the theme of “fleeing”, often discussed by the desert fathers – fleeing meant denying yourself the luxury of solving problems by running away, e.g. by resorting to “human company” who we could manipulate to share out our guilt and reassure us of our rightness. On contrary, we should “stay” – take full responsibility for our sins.

In *Doubts and Loves*, Holloway investigates forgiveness when he talks of moments of acceptance or justification – these come of deepest helplessness, when we have given up the pretence that we are other than we are and are not likely to change, that the moment of grace comes, but a moment that comes in many ways to many different people in many different places. Justification or grace comes when we fully acknowledge who and what we are – our

¹¹² Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 104

¹¹³ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 106.

¹¹⁴ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 110

¹¹⁵ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 131

¹¹⁶ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 112

¹¹⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 125

¹¹⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 97

¹¹⁹ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 44

condition, beyond all denial and dishonesty. However, the moment of grace or justification is a moment of self-acceptance, though not necessarily acceptance of everything we have done¹²⁰.

Holloway dedicated remorse and forgiveness his whole publication *On Forgiveness* addressing this issue from a religious angle. He believes that religion gives us many of the best stories and metaphors for forgiveness¹²¹. However, the role of religion as the provide of the only truth has been lost to secular humanity in the last two centuries resulting in some religions taking a protective route and fortifying behind their own walls instead of promoting the best values¹²². All three religions coming from the stem from Abraham – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – put an emphasis on justice and forgiveness as its counterpart¹²³. But, in Holloway's view drawn from Jacques Derrida's "religion without religion" paradox and his famous claim "There is only a forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable?" He also refers to his claim of Christianisation that no longer need the Christian Church, it's the *how* not *what* we need to focus on¹²⁴. The real beauty of forgiveness is that it can deliver the future to us¹²⁵.

3.7. Love and Charity

Is there any outcome to the fragmented world, any force bringing together humans with lost self in a society boasting of freedom of choices but ignoring underlying determination? Holloway, Williams and Žižek bring each a different answer, however, there seems to be a common denominator – a phenomenon they call *agape*, the 'social miracle', 'ultimate forgiveness' or love that might be able to help us on our journey to better understanding of ourselves, managing our relationship and wisely exercising freedom of choices.

Holloway identifies two paradoxes looming through otherwise indifferent universe, world life – hatred and human compassion¹²⁶. In his discourse on forgiveness and promise, discussed in section 3.6, he refers to Hannah Arendt who claims that: "*without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be contained to one single deed from which could never recover. Without being bound to the fulfilment of promises, we would never be able to achieve the amount of identity*

¹²⁰ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 124

¹²¹ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 1

¹²² Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 4

¹²³ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 7

¹²⁴ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 9

¹²⁵ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 13

¹²⁶ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 19

and continuity which together produce the "person" about whom a story can be told; each of us would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of his own lonely heart, caught in its ever changing moods, contradictions, and equivocal ties¹²⁷. But it's not the action we forgive, it is the individuals; Arendt continues: "by being aimed at someone and not something, forgiveness becomes an act of love." Holloway also emphasizes the need for accepting that in most cases there were unfortunate circumstances that lead an individual to act the way he did. In addition to forgiving others, the hardest task is to forgive ourselves, but only through self-acceptance we can reach self-forgiveness¹²⁸. Being honest about what we have done badly and acknowledge what we have done well in our journey through life can bring self-knowledge that can help us manage our relationships more wisely and look at ourselves with compassionate impartiality¹²⁹. However, same strategy needs to be applied to the victim – painful process of accepting the truth can help the victim to move on to the future however, in many cases, he/she/the group might not be ready to do so, as is the case for example in the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine¹³⁰.

This wisdom of this process is what is in Christian tradition called the confession of sin. Insisting on confession is good for the soul, continues Holloway – regardless whether this practise is done through a priest, a psycho-therapist or your best friend in the pub after a drink too many. This is the instinct to look at what we have made of ourselves and try to do something about it¹³¹. However, in addition to us confessing our acts that prompts forgiveness; Holloway highlights an absolute and unconditional forgiveness, non-resistance Jesus called for overcoming the traditional revenge system, that can create repentance in the heart that has been hardened against changes (see parable of the two sons, Mt 18) or could be so generous that it can redirect the path of history¹³². Holloway refers to J Derrida who says: "pure and unconditional forgiveness, in order to have its own meaning, must have no "meaning", no finality, even no intelligibility. It is a madness of the impossible"¹³³. Nevertheless, in situations of gross and enduring conflict between groups, the emergence of charismatic figures who bear in their own bodies the suffering of their people, yet are able to transcend the pain and lean them beyond it to the peace of forgiveness, is one of the extraordinary spectacles that history affords. It is an insanity of "grace". Believers say, explains Holloway, it has its source in God, who pours out life without calculation from a pure excess of being. Others can see a mystery of this prodigal universe that sometimes

¹²⁷ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 36

¹²⁸ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 48

¹²⁹ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 51

¹³⁰ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 56

¹³¹ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 59

¹³² Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 62

¹³³ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 85

redeems its own pain through extraordinary souls who, from somewhere beyond all possibility, forgive the unforgivable¹³⁴.

The centrality of forgiveness, in the teaching of Jesus, and the new beginning it constantly affords us is his most liberating gift to humanity. This is why following Jesus is both joyful and serious. It is about the enjoyment of life and all its colour, it's banquet, a wedding feast. But it's one to which everyone is invited and that takes work, and sometimes it's dangerous work, because there are many people at the party who don't want to let anyone else in and would, if they got their way, get rid of some who are already there. We have to look at people differently, to practise imaginative compassion, to see the world as it might be and not simply accept it as it is¹³⁵.

Williams looks at love and forgiveness not from personal point of view but from a social angle by identifying a phenomenon we mentioned earlier: a "*social miracle*" – this overcomes the individualism and rediscovers the meaning of the self at an individual and society levels. However, to come to this phenomenon, he looks into the need for charity in the current American and British societies. In the 1980s, the philosophy of a minimalist state to be responsible for war etc. and the "family values" understood as commitment to kinship bonds but nothing in between¹³⁶. This political movement resulted in fragmentations – the society is preoccupied with rights expecting everything to be persuaded from tribunals or interest groups. While the rights of alienated minorities do matter (Afro-american women, homosexuals, ...) as finally voice is given to those suffering years of inequality, this social atmosphere does not support the desirable sharing – "*social miracle*" – and requires everyone to constantly struggle for precedence¹³⁷. Similarly, the minimalist state underestimates the role of public funding and public activities at local level at areas such as art, in need for public subsidy and voluntary support¹³⁸. Williams concludes that the level of public subsidy shows of how far a society as a whole understands charity. Many remaining charitable activities are only weak compensations for the destructive-competitiveness of non-playful society. For example, the translation of sport into industry, surrounded by sponsorship and massive economic investment results in an arbitrary violence between spectators (e.g., football)¹³⁹. Wide media coverage and attention doesn't help to promote the true charitable nature either – e.g., medialised sport defines what "others" (professionals) do and therefore has a discouraging affect¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁴ Holloway. *On Forgiveness*, page 88

¹³⁵ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 231

¹³⁶ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 84

¹³⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 86

¹³⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 88

¹³⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 61

¹⁴⁰ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 62

What is then a charity? Rowan Williams argues that universe is a vast system of cross-reference, to communicate a content is for it to share in the “field” of reference of something else. Rituals of charity have been eroded in the last quarter-century in the North Atlantic society. In his view, a charity in the older sense meant the “love and charity towards your neighbourhoods”, a *social miracle*¹⁴¹ – sectional loyalties were from time to time interrupted and overcome by a sense of integration, of belonging with the entire social body extending far beyond one’s choice or affiliations of interest and “natural” loyalty¹⁴². Charity is the opportunity for suspending relationships characterised by competition and rivalries¹⁴³. Charity could be seen as a game – unproductive, just performing activities that do not make anything concrete out of the common activities agreed. Charity has *something to do* – an activity that does not have to be productive and a “success” is measured simply by the maintenance of the activity itself¹⁴⁴. These voluntary, arbitrary, groundless activities cannot be treated just as ordinary matters of choice: the assumed status cannot simply be withdrawn or conceded by one agent’s decision. To play at all is to deny that kind of “freedom”.

Williams further refers to Charles Taylor who looks at a society as a composition of individuals endowed with intrinsic rights and liberties that require both protection and room for fair and balanced negotiation, and those who see persons as constituted by social and communal belonging and as finding their value or dignity, perhaps even their sense of “rights” through identification with the values of the community¹⁴⁵. Conversation represents the breakthrough into a recognition of common goods things we can only value or enjoy together (welfare, weather, ...) ¹⁴⁶. Charity lies in its complementarity in respect of the negotiating and conflictual world around – it is ‘mythical’ in a way it exists beyond civil and political state¹⁴⁷. In other words, charity is about the bonds that are not negotiation, not the result of balancing interests. Taylor continues that conversation, friendship, attending a concert with other people or sharing a joke are in fact fundamental for any political practice that is not to collapse into an endless bargaining between interests¹⁴⁸. “Social miracle” is not the celebration of an ethnic, racial identity¹⁴⁹ nor trying to dismiss the reality of cultural tradition in their local distinctiveness by defining “what do we happen to have in common?”

¹⁴¹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 54

¹⁴² Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 54

¹⁴³ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 56

¹⁴⁴ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 58

¹⁴⁵ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 75

¹⁴⁶ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 76

¹⁴⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 72

¹⁴⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 77

¹⁴⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 79

Miracle can only happen prior to agreeing what we have in common¹⁵⁰. It's the "doing it together" not that we refer to "something out there" – e.g., a concert that makes the relationship, formation of social joy. Not only doing thing together if my interest involves yours and yours mine that leads to diminishing trust and fidelity because in this case every agent is a temporally agreement by independent partners to do something together, therefore, every individual or interest group is likely to regard it as foreign, as needing always to be persuaded about any specific project or local concern¹⁵¹.

Charity at an education domain have similar features, further investigates Williams. Good education system would be one in which conversation flourished – one where activities were fostered that drew students away from competition as the norm. To acknowledge someone's distinct skills and require them to use it in collaboration with a larger project is an important challenge for the individual. Which doesn't prevent some aspects of the education system to be competitive because they need to be selective, e.g. examination¹⁵². Finally, at the church level, Williams recognises a major shift towards a social miracle – for example, many monks of the Christian world integrate what previously seem impossible to reconcile – deep spiritual practise and conjugal love, solitude and social responsibility¹⁵³.

Holloway on the other hand comments that the most important balances to achieve in the new morality of consent would be between celebrating an allowable diversity in ethical approaches and refusing to accept the claim that no system is better than any other. Human appetite for knowledge is insatiable – this creates endless and fascinating difficulties for us; but this is also our glory, it is what makes us humans, and we should rejoice in it¹⁵⁴. In *Doubts and Loves*, he investigates the role of 'collective consciousness' of the human race and the power of religious narratives that connect us with the general condition of humanity; sorrow and loss, heroism and betrayal, faith and hope – the struggle for wholeness and freedom¹⁵⁵.

What is the impact of social miracle on the Self? The possibility of self-miracle, claims Williams, requires a demythologising the picture of what a self looks like – the picture natural by countless pressures, cultural, political, religious. The central question is: how is my self brought into question? The loss of questioning appropriate to selfhood and the loss

¹⁵⁰ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 81

¹⁵¹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 83

¹⁵² Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 89

¹⁵³ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 13

¹⁵⁴ Holloway. *Godless Morality*, page 160

¹⁵⁵ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 69

of so many of the institutions of charity go together – one cannot be restored without the other¹⁵⁶.

Drawing from the desert fathers in *Silence and Honey Cakes*, Williams presents his theology of self – he refers to St Antony, the father of the monastery life, who summarised his teaching of “life” and “win”. “Winning” is not about succeeding so that other people lose, but about succeeding in connecting others with life-giving reality¹⁵⁷. Also, he refers to the role of the gospel as being able to deliver us from the chief source of our anxieties – the need to protect the picture of ourselves as right and good¹⁵⁸. It’s all about freedom from fear, but we need to develop habits of self-awareness an attention to each other, grounded in the pervasive awareness of God¹⁵⁹. Williams also stresses the need for self-awareness – to be the means of reconciliation for another within the Body of Christ, you must be consciously yourself, knowing a bit about what has made you who you are, what your typical problems and brick walls are, what your gifts are¹⁶⁰. In addition, love is not a feeling of good will towards the neighbour, but the active search for that word – so that I can hear what God has to say to them and give to me through them and also so I can speak to what is real in them, not what suits or interests me and my agenda¹⁶¹. However, communication in love requires certain hesitation, non-wasted words take time to mature as they must come from depth and so from the quiet and expectancy – out of an inner world in which they are at home with self-consciousness¹⁶².

Williams summarises his point: ‘the plain acknowledgement of your solidarity in need and failure opens a door: it shows it is possible to live in the truth and to go forward in hope. It is in such a moment that God gives himself through you, and you become by God’s gift a means of connecting another with God. You have done the job you were created to do’¹⁶³.

Žižek looks at *agape* in Christianity by asking if this is this just another name for Mercy? Žižek claims that through divine self-abandonment signals God’s fundamental imperfection. And it is only within this horizon that the properly Christian Love can emerge, a Love beyond Mercy. Love is love for the Other – because of his limitation, helplessness. In contrast to that, the ultimate secret of the Christian love is the loving attachment to the

¹⁵⁶ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 94

¹⁵⁷ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 32

¹⁵⁸ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 34

¹⁵⁹ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 35

¹⁶⁰ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 40

¹⁶¹ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 73

¹⁶² Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 77

¹⁶³ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 31

Other's imperfection. It is this lack in/of the Other that opens up the space for the "good news" brought by Christianity¹⁶⁴.

Žižek continues by turning this issue around – he discusses an "empty" sacrifice that represents an act seen and received as a sacrifice but that there was nothing to sacrifice, therefore the act didn't fill in the lack. For example, in Henry James's book "Portrait of a Lady", a lady refuses to leave her lover because she is unwilling to change her promise even when she doesn't love him because she would see the act of leaving him as deprivation of her autonomy. He continues, only against the background of this empty gesture one can begin to appreciate the uniqueness of the figure of Christ. He concludes by citing Lacan who believes that we should believe that "Real as impossible" – that the impossible does happen, that "miracles" like Love (here and now; not at another time and place; or political revolution) DO occur. "The impossible happens" is the most difficult thing to accept: "We'd forgotten how to be in readiness even for miracles to happen"¹⁶⁵.

4. Summary and Conclusions

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All three theologian, regardless of the foundations of their theologies and countries of origin, identify and address very similar issues – the same fragments. Therefore, twenty years after the unification of the Eastern and Western Europe, there is no major difference in the main issues on agenda of the leading thinkers.

They however slightly differ in their selection of examples illustrating their thoughts that depend on the country of origin. Žižek has plentiful examples from political events from the former Yugoslavia and the Bosnian war while Williams and Holloway tend to refer to the Western European experiences and often referring to political conflicts of global importance, e.g., Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda.

In post-modernity, our common value system is lost, our understanding of ourselves and the society is fragmented and any possible new uniting paradigm will hardly emerge in a near future. What we called the theology of the world provides a unifying framework enabling us to think about the fragments, their relationships in the context and find common messages. All three authors have identified a phenomena that Žižek calls *agape*, Holloway "love" or "ultimate forgiveness" and Williams a "social miracle" that overarches the fragments and brings rather unexplained human-oriented actions or behaviours, at personal and society

¹⁶⁴ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 147

¹⁶⁵ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 84

levels, that can open new levels of humanity, social justice and true personal freedom and happiness.

In this final chapter, we will summarize the key messages concerning the identified five fragments and discuss my explanations and observations of related issues, and conclude by final remarks.

4.1. Fragments

In this section, will be summarise the five fragments and discuss my observations and experiences. Also, I highlight another one I find important and complementary – the time.

4.1.1. Freedom and Social Responsibility

In 21st century, in European and Northern American societies we experience an unprecedented level of personal and societal freedom. Nevertheless, we have not been equipped to handle freedom and make choices any better than previous generations living in systems founded on an authority. Most people still prefer to hide in some sort of fixed value system, provided either by the traditional religious systems, interests group with strong feeling for “good” that can bring an equally strong religious zeal, such as animal rights fighters and convinced vegetarians, campaigners against globalisation etc. These all have the same need to “believe” in their truth that can simplify the complexity of painful decision making about every single aspect of our lives by providing a fixed value system shared with a closed community where they feel accepted and which protects them from being challenged.

Others hedonistically flick between values defined by celebrity role models who can easily shift public opinions, they easily accept media-enforced values and views, and are driven by coming and going agendas of tabloids, pop/fashion and media cultures. These are the most vulnerable target groups for consume marketing campaigns and large corporate-sponsored social reengineering and marketing campaigns, often hidden behind clever advertising and sponsorships for what could be easily seen as non-profit and even “charitable” events, such as the Olympics. The worrying issue is our unawareness of these escapes from freedom (confirming to a fixed value system or changing values by media/marketing campaigns).

The ease of our life, discussed by Williams and Holloway, as a result of the freedom and economical and political stability we have experienced since the mid 20th century also

resulted in a lack of any major challenges driving our lives. In our over-protected all-inclusively insured western world it is increasingly difficult to find anything to struggle for, to fight for. Is the buzz from ever-popular adrenalin and extreme sports just a short-term reminder of what the previous generations have been experiencing throughout their hard-struggling lives?

I believe that this is strongly linked to the unwillingness to accept responsibilities and take any real risk. For many, it seems preferable to give up the choices enabled by the freedom because we struggle to accept the *responsibility* for our decisions. This, at its extreme, leads to the mainly American legal culture of "suing everyone" for massive financial compensations for what are our own faults, e.g., MacDonald for selling hot coffee, tobacco industry for smokers developing lung cancer, etc. There is a shared belief that there is always someone to blame, someone else who is responsible for something going wrong in my life. Similar famous law case was an American family suing an 18 year old British au-pair for a manslaughter for not preventing their child from dying of suffocation in late 1990s. However, could the responsibility be so easily shifted to an inexperienced foreign teenager getting paid \$50 a week who the parents happily trusted their baby with?

Contrastingly, people trust to give their children to inexperienced teenagers who come to their country for a gap year holiday, while they would not let the same person drive their car without an insurance nor help with managing their home post or finances. Doesn't this demonstrate an important value swap? Why do we have so much more responsibility for things of minimal importance to our lives and happiness (money, cars, houses, mortgages) and are so flexible about personal relationships and irresponsible for the enormous emotional investments required to obtain and sustain these bonds.

The other side of the coin of this over-responsibility for unimportant issues is the raise of a culture of rejection of any long-lasting bonds. This could be explained by the praise for freedom – having all choices at all time and rejecting anything that might restrict my will and free choice. An example is the current trend of frequent career moves, rejection of attempts of establishing longer-lasting relationships, the growing camp of adults who are strongly against having a family and see children as a restriction of their freedom. Obviously, this is a way of exercising our current freedom, however, are we sure we are not hiding our lack of courage and inability to take a responsibility for major life-forming actions and essential bonds, if they require effort, risks, change to our agendas and possibly giving up certain options that could be seen as a limitation of our freedom?

4.1.2. Choices and Determination

All authors come to a conclusion that the current language of free choice false. We are still socially and economically determined; minorities and those disadvantaged are excluded from having stakes in our society. However, this process is happening in a more subtle way than major inequalities were enforced in the past.

Taking their arguments further, I understand that the belief that the freedom of choice, increasing the number of decisions expected from individuals, is a good thing invariably assumes three conditions.

Firstly, this would require that we are able to choose from an easily and objectively measurable or ideally linearly ordered set of options¹⁶⁶. This approach hides the complexity and individual needs when considering options. Williams comments, on the topics of education, the current approach encourages us to assume that there is a single and fairly easily measurable standard of success in education¹⁶⁷. Regarding the accepted performance scoring, we tend to ignore that the league tables are enforced by educational boards, research councils and healthcare authorities. There could be another ordering criteria that would define different “hurdles” which schools, researches, healthcare workers would learn to jump equally effectively. There is no common agreement on the measurable criteria used for the ordering – does not exist but this is due to the complexity and human individuality and diversity of needs and therefore is virtual impossible to define.

Secondly, free choice also assumes that the *choices are equally available* to all involved players regardless their socio-economical, academic and other backgrounds, and relevant personal determinants, which in reality, is not the case. Williams supports this point of view by his discourse about the educational agenda. This is similar to the currently popular ‘patient choice’ agenda in healthcare in the United Kingdom.

Thirdly, a world of true free choice assumes the *same decision making abilities* and same access to underlying information and that we are, as humans, equally equipped with intellectual capacities to make complex decisions required by the current society. This notion is also false as it leaves citizens with lower education levels and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds outside of the decision ring.

¹⁶⁶ By linearly ordered options I mean comparable relationships between all elements enabling linear “rating”, e.g. British system of league tables evaluating academic performance of all schools across the country.

¹⁶⁷ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 35

These conditions are false, and we have also found support by Williams' arguments. I think that the underlying reason for enforcing free choice is the political need to push the responsibility of decision-making regarding complex and expensive issues such as education, social system and healthcare to individuals who then are responsible for making inappropriate choices. However, this is short-sighted and might bring a level of social instability in Europe in the future.

The belief that there is no common understanding of right and wrong and that all is individual based is also false. Williams looks again at the example of education where children are claimed not being taught right and wrong and can only discuss how they make decisions. Apparently, this is justifying by our multicultural environment. He argues that this is not true as, for example, no British Muslim would argue that there is nothing wrong with rape¹⁶⁸, rightness and wrongness of racism was not a matter of cultural specificity. So, what are the common values, those that could possibly serve for defining what is beneficial and what should therefore be implemented at a government and society levels?

Žižek interestingly links our choice to faith. Referring to old Jesuits' axiom, he claims: you must experience yourself as fully responsible – the trust in God must be in your Acts, not in your Belief. This sharply contradicts the common idiom “help yourself and God will help you”.

4.1.3. Self and Soul

The central question according to Williams is: how is my self brought into question? We have lost the right way questioning appropriate to selfhood, there is no natural self-understanding yet we are forced to self-definitions. Common to the current imaginative crisis is the loss of the language of the souls¹⁶⁹.

However, admitting to ourselves that we do not know *how* to make choices about ourselves, we do not know what is good for us (probably less than previous generations), and that we are not sure about what makes us happy might be a good starting point helping us to accept our limitations. This, I believe, can also raise our awareness and help us to be more receptive to what comes from outside, decisions “done for us”. There are situations we have ended up in without our direct involvement or important decisions forced upon us against our will that, in a long run, might have brought what we actually truly wanted. Similarly, we might also be

¹⁶⁸ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 91

¹⁶⁹ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 6

unaware of standing on many life-important crossings and could only retrospectively reflect the importance of these moments for ourselves, and value how profound impact they had on our lives and our relationships. Appreciating the positive impact of externally made decisions and “coincidences” can simplify our difficult decision making by relieving our scare of the fatality of our wrong choices. This observation in words of Rowan Williams might read: how we cope with the inner restlessness which constantly suggests what look like simpler solutions, avoiding the difficult route of changing myself. However, when we begin to discover contemplative faithfulness, we recognise that very occasionally around an unexpected corner or with an unexpected person we catch the “glimpse of the fire”¹⁷⁰. To reiterate this in Žižek’s words: “the impossible happens” is the most difficult thing to accept: “We’d forgotten how to be in readiness even for miracles to happen.”¹⁷¹

Finally, what is important is not what we do but *with whom* and *what it means to us*. As Žižek emphasises at his remark on “sublimation” – the magic moment of love occurs in a everyday acts like even washing dishes ¹⁷².

4.1.4. Forgiveness, Remorse and Reconciliation

All authors find these topics fascinating and essential to responsibly deal with in order to enable us to move on after having done an act we regret or have been victims of such act. However I fully agree that remorse and forgiveness are difficult to admit to ourselves and bring ourselves to a position to forgive, much worth emotional damage could be caused if we are not aware that we have done something wrong or that we have hurt someone. These acts do not necessarily have to be at a level of a crime – minor daily trespasses are of equal importance that can limit our self-understanding, faithfulness and well-being. For example, being unaware of upsetting friends or partners, or causing unnecessary tensions in any kind of relationships, acting selfishly or forcing someone to conform to our decisions or needs could lead to a similar pain and leave scars that might require equally difficult forgiveness and reconciliation process as the one discussed by Holloway. However, what could be done if we go through our life unaware of these acts?

4.1.5. Love and Charity

The notion of charity or a ‘social miracle’ defined by R Williams, love and ultimate forgiveness at Holloway’s writings and *agape* described by Žižek have a common denominator. This type of charitable behaviour requires freedom to break our natural self-

¹⁷⁰ Williams. *Silence and Honey Cake*, page 98

¹⁷¹ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 84

¹⁷² Žižek. *On Belief*, page 41

defence, our images of ourselves, and courage to overcome our interests and change our needs, plans and agendas

I take this argument one step further: these charitable acts might leave us extremity vulnerable and fragile, they might not always pay back. What enables is to overcome ourselves and take the essential risk is *trust*. Trust in those we do something for, those who formed our lives and enabled us to act with this courage, those we love or simply trust in God.

R Holloway in *Doubts and Loves* discusses trust in a relationship with resurrection – we place trust in people, sometimes in a risky way. Trust is important in day-to-day living as we need to try on the knowledge and experience we have built up about friends and institutions over the years. That kind of trust is the reality that undergrids all our important relationships. This is an important factor in our relationships and can empower us to an act of transformation at both the personal and the social level, and one can lead to another. For example, the act of Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama in 1960s, who refused to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus lead into the famous boycott that changed American history and sparked the Martin Luther King-lead movement for equal rights for the black in the United States. That was, in Holloway's words, the resurrection moment. Resurrection, like the social miracle discussed by Williams, is the refusal to be imprisoned any longer – it is the determination to take the first step out of the tomb. It might be a personal circumstance that immobilises us, or a social evil that confronts us: whatever it is, we simply refuse any longer to accept it, because the logic of resurrection calls us to action that opens a possibility to transform lives, attitudes and societies. Therefore, we should continue to struggle with the intractability of our own nature, more importantly, it means joining with others in action to bring new life to human communities that are still in the grip of death¹⁷³.

4.1.6. Time

I find our current notion of time, focussed solely on the presence, another fragment that is a result of the erosions of traditional and nature-based ways of imagining time. Forced by omnipresent marketing and consumerism pressures to believe that everything is as easy as instant shopping results in a hope for an instant needs and desires fulfilment, short-term professional and personal relationships and bonds, and frequent moves. Thus, leading to our inability to get more seriously or/and longer term involved in the same thing. This also

¹⁷³ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 141

enforces the notion of everything being reachable, affordable, effortless. If not, there is even better special offer in a next-door supermarket.

This is also related to the flickering image of modern media communication – all images are volatile, short-lived regardless of if they cover good news or stories of wars and famine¹⁷⁴. I think this is making us almost immune to suffering; unable to understand and feel for the horrors or even good news that we see or read about on a daily basis. In the instant media culture, the headlines of tomorrow have to be even more exciting and shocking than those of today. How with this notion of time can we grasp the complexity of being interweaved with others, those close to us and those far away who entered our lives through a short media shot?

Williams briefly addresses this topic in a relationship with childhood. There is a reluctance to think about the role of time in the formation of identities. This is a result of seeing people as “produced”¹⁷⁵. Childhood is an example of the problem of treating the morally interesting question as one about individuals exercising freedom in a vacuum. The protection of the imaginative space of childhood obviously needs a background of security, adult availability and adult consistency; a background of constantly shifting adult relationships; with the investment of energy involved in starting, sustaining and extricating oneself from relationships doesn’t sound like a promising basis¹⁷⁶.

Time has also a profound role in our decision making – sometimes the most important decisions about Self and our relationships are done implicitly, without us being aware of a decision cross-road, as I discussed in the previous section, but most of times we *do* have to decide. However, important dilemmas cannot be rushed, they need to be ripen – we need to get to the point when we *feel* what to do, which route to take rather when we piled up enough arguments for our cause. The impression that similarly to getting things done and ticked off, we want to ‘have things decided’ and move on in the chosen direction and therefore instantly relieve the excruciating pain of a difficult decision process does not allow for the true self-opening that can move us to new horizons and open view doors to unexpected opportunities. This observation is similar to the one of Williams on the impact of a conflict or frustration on our self-consciousness discussed in section 3.5.

¹⁷⁴ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 136

¹⁷⁵ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 49

¹⁷⁶ Williams. *Lost Icons*, page 51

4.2. Conclusion: No Theology or a Theology of Life?

To summarise we argue for the concept of theology of life could server as unifying framework bringing the fragmented reality in a shared context, providing a common language.

Our understanding and questioning the meaning of life has changed from the uniformity of the past but there has been no major shift since modernity. Holloway looks back to both Nietzsche and Dawkins, both in different centuries and from different perspective wrestled with the question of “meaning”. German theologian Paul Tillich called this struggle or deep questioning an “ultimate concern” – even if our answer is that there is no overall meaning or that life has no meaning this is, according to Tillich, still *a meaning*, because it means something to us¹⁷⁷. For Tillich, the only real atheism is lack of concern for the meaning of our existence: ‘Indifference toward the ultimate question is the only imaginable form of atheism. One is ultimately concerned only about something to which one essentially belongs and from which one is existentially separated. We use the word symbol for these concern – in religious discourse, God is the ultimate symbol¹⁷⁸. In postmodernity we have started seeing differently the old paradox of existence of world outside of our perception – as there is no view that cannot establish the world’s independent existence for us apart from our perception of it – it is, in this way, our mind that calls everything into being, including God. We are straggling between reduction the whole religious experience to human projection, though much of it clearly is, and revert to the pre-critical religious claims¹⁷⁹. The only meaning of our guesses about God, and the religious narratives and traditions is to give them human meanings in order to see that they can teach us, what discoveries we might make through them and what guidance we might make through them and what guidance we might derive from them. The great question of the meaning of Being can then be allowed to overwhelm us with wonder in the presence of life itself¹⁸⁰.

However, religions and especially defending Christianity is not a major theme for either author in the selected titles. Holloway in the *Doubts and Loves* however pursues a route to find a new way of using the Christian tradition that will deepen our humanity, our care for the earth and for one another. It tries to separate Christianity account of meaning from its

¹⁷⁷ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 4

¹⁷⁸ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 55

¹⁷⁹ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 28

¹⁸⁰ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 29

historical packaging that no longer sustains, such as attitude and role of women, scientific theories to the creation etc¹⁸¹.

Also, Holloway believes that theology is really another aspect of psychology, another way of describing human experience and its struggle with itself as everything we have to deal with comes from within us, from our experience and perceptions. Whereas the enduringly fascinating thing about theology is that it provides us with a mirror into our own souls¹⁸².

Holloway looks at the role of theology by concluding that the history of humanity's struggle with God is a history of constant surprise and discovery. This tradition within Christian history Holloway calls "the theology of life". Theology of death is based on a concept of redemption or rescue. Grace and the celebration of life, rather than dread and the fear of death, become the motivators of life and action. It invites people to feel at home in world, to reverence it, and to practise the disciplines of sharing its good things with others, particularly with the poor of the earth. It calls us to courageous actions against all that spoils the joy of life and the sacredness of creation. The *theology of life* calls us, in the language of the prayer of Jesus, to build the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven¹⁸³. It should stand on contemplation, repentance and the remaking of the earth¹⁸⁴.

Žižek makes a similar remark – Christianity is a religion of love and comedy. Love is to be opposed to desire which is always caught in the logic "this is *not* that", while love fully accepts that "this *is* that" – that the woman with all her weaknesses and common features IS the thing I unconditionally love; that Christ, this wretched man, IS the living God. The transcendence is not abolished but rendered accessible – it shines through in this very clumsy and miserable being that I love. Christ, through his death, gave us the possibility of redemption, of getting rid of the excess. Christ does NOT do our work for us, he does not pay our debt, he merely "gives us a chance" – he asserts our freedom and responsibility, he opens up the possibility, for us, to redeem ourselves through the "leap into faith"¹⁸⁵.

4.2.1. Summary

In post-modernity, our self-perception and our view of the world have lost the traditionally shared values, understating of good, and a unified framework of meanings and roles – our paradigm offers multiple and mutually independent fragmented systems. In this thesis, we have investigated Anglican theologians Richard Holloway and Rowan Williams and a

¹⁸¹ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 17

¹⁸² Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 112

¹⁸³ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 241

¹⁸⁴ Holloway. *Doubts and Loves*, page 248

¹⁸⁵ Žižek. *On Belief*, page 105

Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. We have observed that the difference between Eastern and Western European theological frameworks and social experiences has vanished. The line between philosophy and theology has been blurred and is becoming unimportant – issues addressed by both disciplines are very similar; even their language and chosen vocabularies are almost interchangeable.

The actual fragments and their relationships are therefore not too surprisingly very similar – freedom and responsibility, choice and determination, self and soul, forgiveness and remorse, love and charity. The theology of the world provides a shared context for these fragments and identifies a phenomenon called *agape* by Žižek, the “social miracle” by Williams or love and “ultimate forgiveness” by Holloway that, however unclear, very vaguely described and hard to logically grasp, provides an overarching principle – a glimpse of hope for those seeking wholeness and a meaning.

Studying these authors have underpinned some of my own outlooks and brought clarity and sound explanations to my observations and experiences, as I discussed in chapter 4.1. I found rather surprising how down-to-earth and human-driven theologies of Williams and Holloway really are. With an exception of Holloway, Williams and Žižek remain at an observational level. Though they are all very exceptionally reflect the reality, their theologies do not offer much in terms of action and a direction in which one can actively search for the “glimpse of the fire”.

I am aware that my argument for a common denominator of the ‘social miracle’ phenomenon is limited – partially due to the scope of this thesis but mainly due to the impossibility to capture, put in plain words *what exactly* is identified in the described situations. However, we do have a “feeling” that the core of these ‘moments’, despite not being able to fully grasp it, transcendent our human experience, makes us believe that, in Žižek’s words, “miracles do occur”.

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