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Liquid Spirituality in Post-Secular Societies: A Mental Health Perspective on the Transformation of Faith

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Abstract

What happens when the church no longer speaks to the soul, yet the soul keeps searching? Across post-religious Europe, a new kind of spirituality is rising: fluid, fragmented, and deeply personal. It offers comfort where doctrine no longer resonates, and healing where institutions feel distant. As mental health struggles grow, these alternative spiritualities flourish, reflecting the emotional landscape of late modernity, while institutional religion struggles to respond in meaningful, preventive ways. This article first explores the philosophical and cultural shifts that have led from church pews to yoga mats and mindfulness apps. Then it presents new data from some of Europe's most secular countries, examining the relationship between faith, spirituality, and psychological well-being. Finally, it proposes a renewed form of Christian spirituality—one that is emotionally attuned, Spirit-led, and culturally rooted in the liquid realities of our time.

Keywords: mental health; post-secular societies; liquid spirituality



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1. From Church to Couch: The Rise of Secular Spirituality and Its Psychological Hopes

The idea of constant progress, reinforced by the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and the influence of great philosophers, has played a fundamental role in cultures influenced by Christianity. Until recently, this linear concept of time was oriented towards divine intervention, whereby, at the end of history, the kingdom of God would be established “on earth as it is in heaven.”

The post-Enlightenment mentality, however, put man at the center instead of Christ. Max Weber, in his influential theory of the “disenchantment of the world” (*die Entzauberung der Welt*), described this process as a progressive, unilinear development—from primal myths to the “death of God”—driven by rationalization and the dominance of bureaucracy, ultimately leading to the “iron cage” (Partridge 2004, p. 9). As Berger elaborates, the “sacred canopy” began to crumble. “Religion stops at the factory gate” (Berger 1967, p. 128) to make room for one’s further growth and enable one’s emancipation.

This process of secularization marked the liberation of modern societies from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. Consequently, it also led to the secularization of individual consciousness, which began to understand the world without religious interpretations (Berger 1967, p. 107). Karel Dobbelaere describes this as “secularization,” where responsibility for areas such as health care, social care, and education shifted from church organizations to state bureaucracy (Dobbelaere 1981). Sociology, influenced by the secularization thesis, initially saw its role as replacing religion as the main explanatory

framework of reality (cf. Comte's argument that science is a natural result of human progress overcoming religion; Nešpor and Václavík 2008, pp. 19–60). The age of religion, understood in the Marxist spirit as the "opium of the people," was expected to be overcome by gradual progress. People were finally able to attain liberation and the fullness of knowledge in the new order of modern societies of the 20th century.

However, this process did not mean the extinction of the human need for meaning and transcendence. Modern psychology shows that the spiritual dimension is closely linked to psychological well-being (Koenig et al. 2001; Frankl 2006). Secularized societies may have removed institutional religious authority, but in doing so, they have created a vacuum that is now being filled by other forms of spirituality and self-knowledge.

The fact that secular modernity has not brought the expected human liberation, but rather, new existential dilemmas, is supported by empirical data. Research shows that the spiritual aspect of life significantly affects the mental state, from depression (Smith et al. 2003; Braam and Koenig 2019) to mood disorders (Kasen et al. 2012) or anxiety (Koenig et al. 1998). Spirituality is considered a personal quest to understand the meaning of life and connect with a transcendent dimension, leading to feelings of a sense of purpose in life, resilience, adaptive coping, and well-being (van Dierendonck 2012). Reflecting a growing awareness of holistic well-being, the World Health Organization has revised its definition of health to include the spiritual dimension (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, p. 165). To sum up, "spirituality/religiosity has an important influence, one way or another, on mental health outcomes" (Lucchetti et al. 2021). Spirituality, although not the only aspect, influences the inner mental state. While modern society has rejected traditional religious frameworks, it has also lost a deeper existential orientation, which is subsequently reflected in the psychological discomfort of individuals.

Thus, in recent decades, the secularization thesis has come under increasing criticism. Although organized religious institutions are weakening in the public sphere, this does not mean that religion as such is disappearing. However, "the data cannot confirm the historical process predicted by secularization theory" (Hadden 1987, p. 600). The new religious movements that have flooded the religious market with their offerings since the 1960s, along with the rise of conservative Protestantism in the U.S. and the merging of the religious and political spheres in a number of countries, such as Poland, Ireland, Latin America, and the Middle East, suggest that religion is not disappearing; it is transforming. Our world, it seems, is "as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" (Berger 1999, p. 2). The rise of religiosity has led some sociologists to label the secularization thesis as one of the greatest sociological superstitions (Robertson 2007).

1.1. Rise of Alternative and Secular Spirituality

This raises a fundamental question: What is replacing religion today in its impact on spiritual well-being? If traditional forms of religion are weakening in society, what other forms provide people today with meaning, belonging, and a sense of transcendence? If we want to understand the impact of religion on mental health, we must revise secularist teleological visions of the end of religion.

Today's age is aptly referred to as a post-secular age (Habermas 2006, 2008). In all simplicity, this term reflects the fact that religion is not disappearing but has transformed into new forms, from fundamentalist religious movements to alternative spiritual practices, which include secular spirituality.

The two terms used to describe spirituality—"alternative" and "secular"—are closely related but not identical. Alternative spirituality is characterized by its diversity and often eclectic spiritual practices, which may still hold a sense of transcendence. It may include beliefs in cosmic energy, reincarnation, or holistic healing, and often draws from syncretic

traditions such as New Age, neo-paganism, or Eastern philosophies. In contrast, secular spirituality is a specific type of alternative spirituality that distances itself from theistic or metaphysical beliefs and religious forms. However, it still engages with spiritual language, ethical values, rituals, or experiences of transcendence (Walach 2014; Blankholm 2022).

Partridge (2004), in his work on the “re-enchantment of the West,” argues that although the Western world appears to be undergoing secularization, in reality, we are experiencing a confluence of secularization and sacralization (p. 4). This re-enchantment of Western culture means a shift from institutionalized religion to subjectively experienced spirituality. This shift is characterized by a “subjective turn,” which prioritizes internal sources of authority and the cultivation of one’s own unique subjective life (Partridge 2005, pp. 6–8), in contrast to “life-as” religion rooted in external authority (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). Paul Heelas (1996) sees this shift as a celebration of the self, where the sacred is relocated from transcendent sources to immanent experience. These spiritualities are often eclectic, personalized, and pragmatic—tailored to meet emotional and existential needs rather than doctrinal demands (Blankholm 2022; Walach 2014). They flourish especially in secular societies, offering a sense of connection, healing, and meaning without institutional constraints.

Therefore, one possible response to this transformation is secular spirituality, a phenomenon involving specific spiritual practices such as mindfulness, meditation, yoga, ecological ethics, or therapeutic rituals. For many people today, it represents a substitute for institutionalized religion (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). However, this is not just a cultural trend, but specifically a psychological adaptation of human religiosity. The growing popularity of alternative spiritual practices shows that the human spiritual need persists and has a profound effect on mental health (cf. Davidson and Kaszniak 2015; Koenig et al. 2001). According to this observation, one has always already been a religious creature, *homo religiosus*, and his religiosity has always affected his mental condition. Thus, in the absence of traditional religious forms, new forms of spirituality emerge to meet the needs of the “new age of wellbeing” (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, pp. 83–94).

However, secular spirituality is not only a response to the decline of traditional forms of religion, but also to the rise of religious fundamentalism. While fundamentalism tends to be associated with literal, intolerant, and often extremist interpretations of sacred texts (although its present-day forms cannot be clearly defined), secular spirituality seeks to distance itself as much as possible from binding religious systems. If fundamentalism arose as a reaction to liberal modernity, then secular spirituality is a reaction to the rigidity of fundamentalism, opting for an individualistic pragmatism rather than a dogmatic approach.

1.2. “Liquid Spirituality” in the Liquid Age

This form of spirituality, which dispenses with a direct connection to religion, brings a new spiritual offering to the religious marketplace. It responds to the needs of people who are influenced by individualism, indifference to and even resistance to institutions and authority, and a focus on subjective development, self-realization, and the so-called “spiritualities of life.” Secular spirituality is detraditionalized and decentralized. As such, it essentially reflects the principle of liquid modernity as described by Zygmunt Bauman:

Fluids travel easily . . . unlike solids, they are not easily stopped—they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others, and bore or soak their way through others still . . . These are reasons to consider ‘fluidity’ or ‘liquidity’ as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity. (Bauman 2000, p. 2)

Bauman emphasizes that “the liquidizing powers have moved from the ‘system’ to ‘society’, from politics’ to ‘life-policies’—or have descended from the ‘macro’ to the ‘micro’

level of social cohabitation" (Bauman 2000, p. 7). In the era of liquid modernity, people have to create their own values and life patterns—they are no longer dictated by external society. They are more flexible but, at the same time, unstable. This places great responsibility on individuals who are both free and vulnerable.

In this sense, what we call a "liquid" secular spirituality does not constitute a rigid or formal category but rather a descriptive concept we use to highlight the detraditionalized, individualized, and emotionally pragmatic character of many secular spiritual practices emerging in post-secular societies. It is indeed "fluid." On one hand, secular spirituality distances itself from traditional religion and its institutions, but on the other hand, it draws on core concepts such as the search for meaning, transcendence, personal growth, and spiritual experience. Secular spirituality thus creates an alternative framework that prioritizes individual experience over solid dogmatic structures. It is deeply pragmatic. It flows like a whirlpool around its center, which is one's needs. This aligns with Bauman's view of consumerism as the dominant way individuals relate to the world in liquid modernity—no longer focused on fulfilling concrete needs, but rather, on indulging ever-shifting personal desires and fantasies (cf. Bauman 2000, pp. 74–75). Spirituality is seen as another good that offers the consumer instant gratification instead of a lasting solution, echoing Bauman's reference to George Steiner's "casino culture" (Bauman 2000, p. 159). The goal is not satisfaction per se, but the continuous search for fulfillment of desires that are inherently unfulfillable. In this consumerist framework, spiritual practices become an exorcism of "the gruesome apparitions of uncertainty and insecurity which keep haunting the nights" (Bauman 2000, p. 81). As the roots of inner discontent remain untouched, this ritual is repeated over and over again as an ever-evolving DIY spirituality. From a mental health perspective, these rituals function as coping mechanisms—albeit ones that often lack deeper grounding or long-term efficacy. While they can provide short-term emotional relief, they seldom address underlying symptoms of chronic anxiety, relational isolation, or existential depression.

Secular spirituality is based on this subjective experience and the authenticity of personal search, coming from the perspective of "the massive subjective turn of modern culture" (Taylor 1991, p. 26). The concept of a liquid secular spirituality is, therefore, proving to be an increasingly attractive alternative for liquid-age people who reject traditional religion but, at the same time, recognize the deep need for a spiritual dimension in their lives.

Now, an important question remains whether secular spirituality fulfills similar functions to traditional religion—that is, whether it provides the meaning, community support, and stress-coping mechanisms that are often associated with the positive impact of religion on mental health. Mindfulness, meditation, and community rituals—key components of secular spirituality—have been shown to reduce anxiety, promote neuroplasticity, and strengthen social bonds (Lynn and Basso 2023). However, Bauman (2000) would probably describe these community rituals and social bonds as "cloakroom communities," which are temporary groups of people gathered around shared interests:

Cloakroom communities need a spectacle which appeals to similar interests dormant in otherwise disparate individuals and so bring them all together for a stretch of time when other interests—those which divide them instead of uniting—are temporarily laid aside, put on a slow burner or silenced altogether. Spectacles as the occasion for the brief existence of a cloakroom community do not fuse and blend individual concerns into 'group interest'; by being added up, the concerns in question do not acquire a new quality, and the illusion of sharing which the spectacle may generate would not last much longer than the excitement of the performance. (p. 200)

The desire for belonging persists and reflects a basic human need, but it is practiced today in forms that, due to the principle of consumerism's superficiality, lack deep roots and long-term durability. In addition, such individualized forms of spiritual engagement respond to deep psychological needs, but also risk intensifying them. The constant search for authenticity and emotional fulfillment without stable relational structures or theological grounding can lead to spiritual fatigue, emotional burnout, or anxiety rooted in performative self-construction (cf. [Hall and Hall 2021](#); [Koenig et al. 2001](#)).

In this sense, secular spirituality can be understood as a "religion without God," where transcendence, meaning, and community are not linked to a particular theology, but to individual experiences ("spectacles") and values. When combined with self-development elements, it appears as a non-religious call for improved mental well-being. Nevertheless, secular spirituality, in its (inherently) consumerist form, may offer only superficial improvement in the long term. Since it satisfies only fleeting desires and does not offer deep human relationships, it limits its impact to the therapy chair or meditation mat, not to an abundant life from a holistic perspective. This spiritual phenomenon thus reflects a post-secular consumeristic age in which religion does not disappear but is transformed into new forms that respond to the current needs and worldview of society.

As secular spirituality grows, it raises an essential question for missional practice: How can traditional religions, such as Christianity, respond to these shifting dynamics? If religious institutions are to regain trust in a post-secular society, they must acknowledge new frameworks of people's needs and offer a form of Christian spirituality that is both rooted in tradition and adaptable to contemporary existential concerns. It must offer a deep, biblically sound spirituality that does not fulfill only superficial and fleeting desires—a spirituality that deeply cares about one's state, so it can, with the power of the Holy Spirit, convey Jesus' offer of life in abundance (John 10:10) holistically, i.e., externally and internally. As evidenced by the growth of new spiritualities of life focused on the pragmatic contribution to well-being, today's Christian spirituality must not forget the importance of mental health.

This new Christian spirituality must be solid in being faithful to the Bible while being sufficiently adaptable and liquid, as God the Holy Spirit is, indeed, "liquid." Solid dogmatism must be modified by a living, dynamic, and life-giving movement of the Holy Spirit. This new post-secular Christian spirituality, sensitive to late modernity, relies more on the Ruler than on rules. It is not completely without a framework, but its liquidity springs from the Water of Life. It is comfortable to appreciate that "the wind blows wherever it pleases . . . So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, NIV). After presenting data on the current trajectory of secularization in Europe and the limited effectiveness of traditional church spirituality forms within this climate, we will conclude by offering concrete proposals for a renewed and contextually relevant expression of Christian spirituality.

2. A Case Study of Religiosity, Spirituality, and Mental Health in Six Highly Secular European Countries

Following the philosophical and theoretical framework outlined above, we now present a brief case study of religiosity, spirituality, and mental health. Based on Pew Research (2018), we have identified six of some of the most secular countries in Europe, secular in one way or another: Estonia, Denmark, Czechia, Sweden, Belgium, and, for practical reasons, also the Netherlands ([Evans and Baronavski 2018](#)). The prevalence of liquid secular spirituality, as previously described, is particularly evident in these societies where traditional religion has significantly declined, yet spiritual seeking continues in fragmented and individualized forms. After describing the religious profiles of these countries (both at the societal level and within the Seventh-day Adventist community), we examine data on

religiosity and spirituality, followed by an analysis of mental health outcomes. Particular attention is given to the role spirituality plays in addressing mental health concerns within both the general population and Adventist congregations.

2.1. Religious Profiles

The six European countries examined (see Table 1) represent some of the most secularized societies in Europe. As the table shows, each has a historically Christian identity, whether Catholic (Belgium, Czechia), Lutheran (Denmark, Estonia, Sweden), or a mixed Protestant-Catholic heritage (Netherlands). However, over the past several decades, a significant shift has taken place toward religious disaffiliation. Current estimates suggest that only between 9% and 15% of their populations are actively religious, with Czechia standing out as the most secular (approximately 72% unaffiliated), followed by Estonia and the Netherlands (both around 58%). This snapshot reflects both the long-term decline in institutional Christianity and the persistence of small but stable religious subgroups within these predominantly secular contexts.

Table 1. Demographic Religious Data.

Country	Population 2021	Main Historic Religion	Non-Religious/Unaffiliated (Approx.)	Actively Religious (Approx.) ^{a*}
Belgium	11,521,238 ^b	Catholic	~30% ^c	10% [*]
Czechia	10,524,167 ^d	Catholic (historically)	~72% unaffiliated ^e	11% ^f
Denmark	5,840,045 ^g	Lutheran (state church)	~30% unaffiliated ^h	10% [*]
Estonia	1,331,824 ⁱ	Lutheran (nominal); Orthodox minority	~54% unaffiliated ^j	9% ^k
Netherlands	17,337,403 ^l	Mixed Protestant/Catholic (historically)	~57% unaffiliated ^m	15% [*]
Sweden	10,415,811 ⁿ	Lutheran (former state church)	~52% unaffiliated ^o	9% [*]

Data available from the following sources: Actively religious: ^a <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/> (accessed on 14 September 2025); Belgium: ^b <https://data.gov.be/en/datasets/nodeid5660> (accessed on 14 September 2025); ^c <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/belgium/> (accessed on 14 September 2025); Czechia: ^d <https://csu.gov.cz/produkty/the-czso-presented-the-first-results-of-the-2021-census> (accessed on 14 September 2025); ^e <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/05/10/religious-affiliation/> (accessed on 14 September 2025); ^f https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/02/once-the-same-nation-the-czech-republic-and-slovakia-look-very-different-religiously/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed on 14 September 2025); Denmark: ^g <https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/borgere/befolkning/befolkningstal> (accessed on 14 September 2025); ^h <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2018/05/Being-Christian-in-Western-Europe-FOR-WEB1.pdf#:~:text=relatively%20large%20shares%20of%20highly,high%20levels%20of%20religious%20commitment> (accessed on 14 September 2025); Estonia: ⁱ <https://stat.ee/en/statistics-estonia/population-census-2021> (accessed on 14 September 2025); ^j <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/estonia> (accessed on 14 September 2025); ^k https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/5/411?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed on 14 September 2025); Netherlands: ^l https://inspire-geoportal.ec.europa.eu/srv/api/records/CENSUS_INS21ES_A_NL_2021_0000 (accessed on 14 September 2025); ^m <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/Netherlands> (accessed on 14 September 2025); Sweden: ⁿ <https://newibnet.org/country-profiles/Sweden> (accessed on 14 September 2025); ^o <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/03/26/religious-switching-into-and-out-of-the-religiously-unaffiliated-group> (accessed on 14 September 2025).

To contextualize the role of faith communities in secular societies, the Table 2. presents membership data from the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church across the six countries. As of 2021, the size of the Adventist population varies considerably, ranging from just over 1200 in Estonia to nearly 7500 in the Czech Republic (Moravia and Silesia are a lot more religious than Bohemia). Estonia stands out with the highest concentration of Adventists relative to population—approximately one Adventist per 1035 citizens (0.10% of the population), despite a notable average annual decline in membership of −2.31% between 2012 and 2021. By contrast, Belgium and the Netherlands experienced moderate positive growth (3.29% and 2.13% annually, respectively), suggesting small but steady engagement.

In countries like Denmark and Sweden, membership has remained relatively stagnant or declined slightly. While these figures represent a very small fraction of each country’s total population, they offer insight into the potential reach of Adventist spirituality and its implications for offering holistic well-being—including mental and emotional health—within highly secularized settings.

Table 2. Seventh-day Adventist Demographical Statistics.

Country	SDA Church Membership and % of Population 2021	Average Annual Growth Rate (2012–2021)	Number of Citizens per 1 Seventh-day Adventist
Belgium	2979 (0.03%)	3.29%	3867
Czechia	7349 (0.07%)	−1.57%	1430
Denmark	2379 (0.04%)	−0.53%	2445
Estonia	1287 (0.10%)	−2.31%	1035
Netherlands	5996 (0.03%)	2.13%	2891
Sweden	2911 (0.03%)	0.53%	3578

Data derived from Table 1 and from <https://adventiststatistics.org/>, (accessed on 13 September 2025).

2.2. The Societal Trends in Religiosity and Spirituality

The above-listed secular countries exhibit notable patterns in religiosity and spirituality. The available online research indicates several trends: Apatheism and Non-Response, Surging Non-Affiliation, Decline of Established Churches, and Rise of Spiritual but Not Religious” (SBNR).

Apatheism and Non-Response: In increasingly secular societies, people are more willing to explicitly identify as non-religious, rather than leave the question unanswered. For example, in the Czech Republic’s 2011 census, 44.7% of respondents left the religion question blank; by 2021, that share dropped to 30.1% as more people chose “no religion” (Census 2021). Estonia saw a similar decline in non-response, from about 17% in 2011 to 13% in 2021 (Estonia Counts 2022). It appears people are becoming more comfortable stating that they have no religion. In countries without a religion question on the census (like the Netherlands), surveys likewise show very low refusal rates; over half of Dutch adults now say they have no religious affiliation (Statistics Netherlands 2024)). In some places, a small percentage still prefer not to disclose (around 5% of respondents declined to answer a belief question in a recent poll in Belgium (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Belgium, accessed on 13 September 2025). These trends suggest a growing apatheism—indifference toward religion, rather than mere unwillingness to respond.

Surging Non-Affiliation: All six countries examined have seen a substantial rise in the share of residents with no religious affiliation (“nones”). In Czechia and Estonia, this group was already a majority (on the order of 70%) two decades ago and remains so today (Evans 2017; Estonia Counts 2022). In Sweden, Belgium, and the Netherlands, non-affiliation has grown from a minority to roughly half or more of the population in recent years. For instance, about 52% of Swedish adults now identify as religiously unaffiliated (Lesage et al. 2025); in the Netherlands, 58% of the population had no religion by 2023 (Statistics Netherlands 2024)) and an Ipsos survey in 2023 found 47% of Belgians with no religion (versus 44% Christian; Wikipedia 2025a). Denmark, while still having a majority formally in the national church, has also seen church membership decline (from 85% of the population in 2000 to 74% in 2020; Wikipedia 2025b)—meaning non-membership rose from 15% to 26%. Each younger generation is less religiously affiliated and observant than the previous one: youth under 30 in these countries overwhelmingly identify as having no religion (for example, 70–80% of young adults in Estonia, Sweden, and the Netherlands, and 91% in

Czechia have no religious affiliation; [Sherwood 2018](#)). In short, none of these countries has experienced a religiosity increase; the decline of formal religion is a broad European trend ([Sherwood 2018](#)).

Decline of Established Churches: Traditional church adherence has been steadily waning. By the 2010s and 2020s, disaffiliation and generational replacement have caused Christian identification to shrink across Europe. Pew Research data show that between 2010 and 2020, the number of Christians in Europe fell by 9%, and the Christian share of Europe's population dropped from roughly 75% to 67% ([Hackett et al. 2025](#)). Conversely, the religiously unaffiliated (the "nones") jumped by ~37% over that decade, rising to a quarter of Europe's population ([Hackett et al. 2025](#)).

The Lutheran state churches of Scandinavia have lost members continuously—for example, Sweden's Church of Sweden had 82.9% of the population as members in 2000, falling to 55.2% by 2020 ([Svenska kyrkan 2021](#)). Denmark's national church similarly dropped from 85% to 74% membership between 2000 and 2020 ([Wikipedia 2025b](#)). In Belgium, the once overwhelming Catholic majority shrank to a plurality: Catholics made up around 75% of Belgians in 1980 but only about 45% by 2020 ([Wikipedia 2025a](#)). In the Netherlands, both the Protestant and Catholic communities have dwindled such that no single church denomination today claims more than about one-fifth of the population (Roman Catholics are the largest group at 18% as of 2021, down from 27% in 2010; [CNE.News 2022](#)). In Czechia and Estonia, organized Christianity was already relatively weak and has become even more so—for example, Czech Catholicism, once the faith of the majority in the early 20th century, is now professed by only about 10% of the population ([Wikipedia 2025c](#)). Overall, religious institutions play a far smaller public role now than a generation ago, and religious identity is no longer a default for most people in these societies ([Sherwood 2018](#)).

Rise of "Spiritual but Not Religious" (SBNR): Despite low formal religiosity, alternative forms of spirituality have become prevalent. Many people disclaim organized religion but hold spiritual beliefs or engage in practices outside traditional churches. Surveys in Western Europe show that those who consider themselves "spiritual but not religious" often outnumber those who are "religious and spiritual." For example, in Belgium, about 31% of adults believe in "a spirit or life force" rather than a personal God, without formally adhering to a religion ([Wikipedia 2025a](#)). In Denmark, 47% believe in some sort of spirit or life force (exceeding the 28% who believe in a personal God). Even in the highly secular Czech and Estonian cultures, supernatural and metaphysical beliefs remain widespread—people may reject churches yet believe in fate, energy, or folk healing. In Czechia, only 29% say they believe in God, but 43% believe in fate and 44% believe in the existence of the soul ([Pew Research Center 2017](#)). A majority of Czechs hold at least some supernatural belief; for instance, over half (53%) believed in fortune tellers as of 2006 ([Wikipedia 2024](#)). The Netherlands, likewise, has a diffused landscape of individualized spirituality, with many individuals picking and choosing beliefs (in karma, astrology, mindfulness, etc.) that give personal meaning while eschewing dogma and church authority. As noted in the literature and already mentioned above, alternative spirituality has become an integral part of life for many. In Estonia—often cited as one of the least religious countries—belief in unseen forces is remarkably high: about 65% of Estonians agree that "there is some power, life force or energy that influences people and the world" ([Mayer 2015](#)). An overwhelming 77% of Estonians say they believe that psychic healers can cure people (even though only 12% have actually used such alternative healing) ([Mayer 2015](#)). Similarly, sizable shares of Czechs and other secular Europeans believe in destiny, spiritual energy, or healing practices. In short, personalized spirituality is replacing traditional religion—people are seeking experiential and pragmatic spiritual practices outside church structures, reflecting a turn toward individualistic and secular forms of the sacred.

Despite their economic prosperity and high rankings in human development, all six countries in this study—Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, and Sweden—face considerable mental health burdens (see Table 3). According to the [World Health Organization \(2025\)](#), the prevalence of depressive disorders ranges from 5% (in most countries) to 6% in Estonia and Sweden. Eurobarometer data from 2023 provide a more expansive picture by including self-reported experiences of depression or anxiety, showing much higher rates: 55% of Swedes, 50% of Estonians, and 48% of Czechs indicated they had experienced either condition. Even countries with slightly lower prevalence, like Denmark (34%) and the Netherlands (35%), still report a significant mental health impact across their populations.

Table 3. Mental Health in Highly Secular European Countries.

Country	Prevalence of Depressive Disorders 2021 ^a	Depression or Anxiety 2023 ^b	Age-Standardized Suicide Rate 2021 ^c
Belgium	5%	37%	14%
Czechia	5%	48%	10%
Denmark	5%	34%	8%
Estonia	6%	50%	13%
Netherlands	5%	35%	9%
Sweden	6%	55%	12%

Data available from the following sources: ^a ([World Health Organization 2025](#)); ^b ([Eurobarometer \(2023\)](#)); ^c ([International Association for Suicide Prevention \(IASP\)](#)).

The suicide rates further reflect the mental health landscape. These rates ranged from 8 per 100,000 in Denmark to 14 per 100,000 in Belgium, with Estonia (13) and Sweden (12) reporting higher-than-average suicide rates ([World Health Organization 2025](#)). Taken together, these figures challenge the notion that secularism inherently leads to emotional well-being. While low levels of religiosity may be linked to greater individual freedom and autonomy, they do not necessarily equate to better mental health outcomes.

These data on elevated levels of psychological distress in highly secular societies provide an important contextual backdrop for understanding the emergence and popularity of alternative and secular spiritualities. These forms of spirituality, as already outlined, often function as coping mechanisms, offering momentary or situational relief in response to the existential challenges and mental strain associated with contemporary post-religious life, as developed above.

This observation raises a critical question: Does this trend indicate that the church, in its current forms of spiritual communication and practice, is failing to offer deeper and more enduring forms of relief and healing? And further: is it possible to communicate the message of Christianity in a way that is both contextually relevant and spiritually effective, without reducing it to the superficial categories and expectations assumed by the culture of liquid modernity?

Let us look at mental health in one denomination in Table 4. The 2023 Global Church Member Survey (GCMS) provides a rare window into the mental health status of Seventh-day Adventists living in some of the most secular societies in Europe. Although the Adventist population in these countries represents a small religious minority, the data reveal that church membership does not necessarily shield individuals from psychological distress.

In terms of anhedonia (“little interest or pleasure in doing things”), Estonia reports the highest percentage among respondents (59.0%), followed by the Czech Republic (43.6%) and Denmark (33.3%). This is particularly striking, considering that the general population in Estonia reports depressive symptoms at a comparable but slightly lower rate

(Eurobarometer 2007). A similar pattern is observed in the Czech Republic, where 43.9% of Adventists report feeling down, depressed, or hopeless, nearly mirroring the general population estimate of 48%.

Table 4. Global Church Member Survey Findings.

Country	SDA GCMS 2023 Sample Size	Little Interest or Pleasure in Doing Things	Feeling Down, Depressed, or Hopeless	Suicidal Thoughts
Belgium	9	33.3%	33.3%	0% *
Czechia	110	43.6%	43.9%	8.9%
Denmark	21	33.3%	33.3%	0% *
Estonia	40	59.0%	47.5%	7.5%
Netherland	48	26.8%	25.5%	4.5%
Sweden	58	25.9%	25.9%	5.2%

Source: GCMS 2023 data is owned by the ASTR of the [General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists \(2023\)](#); used by permission. *: very small number of respondents, data statistically not significant.

Suicidal thoughts, another critical indicator of mental health challenges, were reported by 8.9% of Czech Adventists, 7.5% of Estonian Adventists, and lower but still significant percentages in the Netherlands (4.5%) and Sweden (5.2%). These figures are sobering, particularly given that suicidal ideation is a rarely discussed topic in most church settings, which often lack the psychological infrastructure to address such issues adequately. For comparison, Castillejos-Anguiano et al. conclude their meta-analysis of suicidality prevalence in the European general population that at some point of life 9% of Europeans will think about suicide (Castillejos-Anguiano et al. 2019, p. 15).

Interestingly, Adventists in the Netherlands and Sweden report significantly lower levels of emotional distress than their counterparts in Eastern Europe. In Sweden and the Netherlands, roughly one in four respondents reported experiencing depressive feelings or anhedonia—a rate notably lower than both their national averages and the corresponding figures among Adventists in Estonia and the Czech Republic. While the smaller sample sizes in some countries (e.g., Belgium, Denmark) caution against over-interpretation, the broader trend is clear: mental health struggles are present within the Adventist community, sometimes at rates comparable to or exceeding the general population.

This data challenges the simplistic assumption that religious affiliation—especially within a structured church environment—naturally fosters emotional well-being. As the next section will explore, spiritual resources and theological frameworks may offer unique tools for emotional resilience, but only when they are integrated into a relational and psychologically informed church culture.

2.3. Incorporation of Spirituality in Mental Care

Across Europe's most secular nations, mental health is gaining attention as a critical public-health issue—even as religion plays a diminished role in public life. Below is a summary of how six countries are integrating spirituality and existential support into formal care systems:

Estonia: Around 25% of adults are at risk for depression, and 20% for generalized anxiety (2023). While mental health care remains primarily clinical and secular, there is growing acknowledgment among practitioners that spiritual well-being can significantly influence mental outcomes. In a largely non-religious society, many Estonians turn to informal sources of meaning—such as nature, family, personal philosophies, or secular spiritual practices like meditation or mindfulness.

Czech Republic: Under communism, psychiatric care in Czechia was institutionalized and outdated. Since then, the system has been reformed, and today approximately 20–25% of adults experience a mental disorder annually. Chaplaincy services have been introduced in hospitals—including psychiatric wards—and are available on request, although only a minority of patients seek religious counsel (Czech Republic, Ministry of Health 2019; Beláňová 2022). Instead, Czechs typically rely on secular avenues for existential support (readings, nature excursions, and secular spirituality, e.g., yoga, meditation).

Although these chaplains offer culturally contextualized spiritual care, their roles often remain independent of congregational life. Most are employed by hospitals or public institutions, not churches, and are bound by ethical standards that prohibit proselytizing—reflecting Czech history and sensitivity around religious influence. While local churches affirm holistic well-being, they often lack the resources or relevant appeal to engage outsiders beyond doctrinal reaffirmation.

Denmark and Sweden: In both countries, spiritual care is officially integrated into public institutions via chaplaincy:

- Denmark: The state church framework supports a chaplaincy model that provides optional spiritual care but excludes evangelism. For non-religious Danes, secular practices—such as mindfulness, meditation, and nature- or forest-bathing—have become prominent tools for holistic well-being.
- Sweden: The Church of Sweden continues to supply chaplains across hospitals, hospices, and the military, focusing on emotional and existential support. Standard practice includes respecting a patient’s worldview and offering access to imams, rabbis, or humanist counselors upon request. Sweden was also among the first to officially include humanist chaplains—nonreligious professionals who address existential concerns without invoking religious doctrine.

Belgium: Belgium employs a pluralistic chaplaincy model, recognizing spiritual care as a right irrespective of faith. Hospitals staff professional caregivers from religious and secular backgrounds, allowing patients to choose someone aligned with their worldview. This inclusive system reflects a society that, while largely secular, still values access to spiritual support, adapted to a patient-centric ethos.

Netherlands: The Netherlands has been a pioneer in institutionalizing spiritual care since the 1950s. Spiritual caregivers—religious or secular—are considered a legal right in institutional care, backed by state funding. The country also extends spiritual care into homes, particularly for the elderly and palliative patients, embodying a culturally pluralistic approach to well-being.

Summary: Secularization has not eliminated the need for spiritual or existential care within mental-health systems. Instead, each country has crafted unique, culturally sensitive responses—ranging from chaplaincy embedded in traditional religious frameworks (Denmark, Sweden) to pluralistic models (Belgium, Netherlands), or chaplaincy services that remain institutionally separate (Czechia). The growing integration of secular spiritual practices alongside clinical mental-health services shows that while religion may no longer dominate public life, the human hunger for meaning, belonging, and existential peace persists. These dynamics underscore a vital opportunity: for spirituality—in both church-affiliated and secular forms—to complement psychotherapy, community support, and holistic wellness programs fruitfully.

3. From Fragmentation to Formation: Toward a New Christian Liquid Spirituality

As it has already been presented, the theoretical framework, alongside the data (in both church-affiliated and secular forms) from Europe, highlights a crucial deficiency in the

current forms of institutional Christianity. If neither secular spirituality frameworks (as it was criticized above) nor religious institutions (as data show) offer consistent psychological flourishing, what then might a renewed Christian spirituality look like? In this part, we want to submit a framework for a Christian spirituality that is grounded in the gospel, well-being-focused, and culturally relevant (see Figure 1).

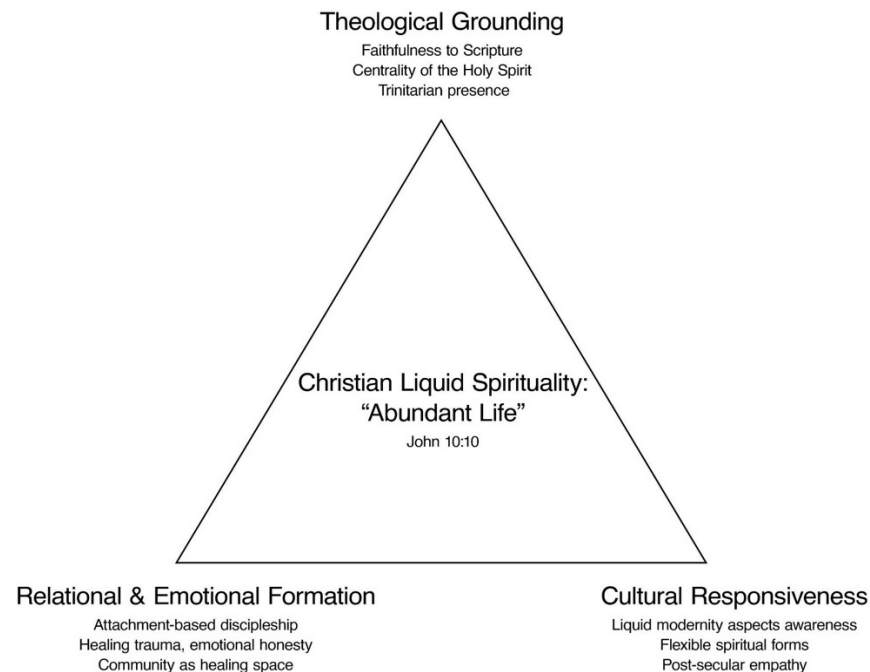


Figure 1. A Theological Framework for Christian Liquid Spirituality.

In the broader context of rising secular and alternative spiritualities, contemporary Christianity exhibits diverging internal tendencies. On one side, certain strands of intellectual fundamentalism have doubled down on doctrinal precision and apologetics, yet often lack the emotional attunement and relational healing needed in postmodern societies. On the other extreme, some Pentecostal and charismatic movements have emphasized emotional experience and divine encounter, offering vibrant expressions of faith—but at times with insufficient psychological grounding, leading to spiritual bypassing or even psychological traumatization. This kind of hype might result from an egocentric, narcissistic drive for fulfillment (cf. Walach 2014, pp. 180–85) and thus fails to foster secure, relationship-based attachments.

From both perspectives, as Peter Scazzero warns, many discipleship models in such traditions “often only add an additional protective layer against people growing up emotionally.” Practices such as worship, prayer, or Bible study may give the appearance of spiritual progress, “even if their relational life is fractured and their interior world is disordered,” and thus “provide a spiritual reason for not doing the hard work of maturing” (Scazzero 2017, p. 16).

The Spirit-led relational spirituality presented in this paper seeks a third way: a biblically faithful and emotionally mature spirituality that integrates attachment-based healing, theological depth, and cultural responsiveness. It does not reject the strengths of either tradition but addresses their limitations by rooting spiritual formation in safe, Spirit-filled relationships that lead to both healing and mission.

While this paper emphasizes the therapeutic and relational dimensions of the Spirit’s work, we do not reduce the Spirit merely to a vehicle of emotional relief. Rather, we affirm the full biblical portrayal of the Spirit as the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; cf. John 14:6), wisdom and counsel (Isa 11:2), who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment

(John 16:7–11). True healing arises not in opposition to truth and righteousness, but through them. The relational spirituality we propose seeks to integrate both sides of human knowing: cognitive and affective, intellectual and intuitive, explicit and implicit (Hall and Hall 2021). Jesus himself embodies this integration. When he says, “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32, NIV), the Semitic thinking of “knowing” implies existential, relational knowledge rather than mere cognitive assent. This truth is not a static doctrine in the Hellenistic sense, but a dynamic and personal reality—Jesus himself (cf. John 1:14; 14:6)—whose presence heals, convicts, and liberates, as expressed in his programmatic announcement of the coming Kingdom of God in Luke 4:14–21.

In this way, Spirit-led relational spirituality affirms that emotional health and biblical truth are not opposites, but companions on the path of discipleship and mission. The goal of the Spirit’s work is not psychological comfort, but Christ-conformity (cf. Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). Emotional healing is a gracious byproduct of being formed into Christ’s image through the Spirit’s transforming presence in a discipleship process. As such, this spirituality retains a deeply biblical view of the Spirit as the One who glorifies Christ (John 16:14), empowers witness (Acts 1:8), and brings forth fruit that reflects divine character (Gal 5:22–23).

This relational and Spirit-led model of Christian spirituality is reclaiming its biblical roots, while being contextually responsive to the conditions of late modernity. Based on the concept of relational spirituality by Hall and Hall (2021), this model centers on the integration of emotional, spiritual, and relational dynamics in the process of spiritual transformation. It draws on deep relationships as opposed to Bauman (2000) “cloakroom communities,” underlining today’s radical individualism. Rather than understanding faith as cognitive assent to doctrine or mere behavioral conformity, relational spirituality understands human beings as neuro-relational creatures—wired for connection, shaped by attachment, and transformed not through obligation but through deeply safe, emotionally attuned relationships with God and others. These relationships, however, are not an end in themselves; they serve as a means by which the Spirit leads believers into Christlike maturity, deeper engagement with the truth, and participation in God’s mission.

In an age of liquid modernity marked by fragmentation, rootlessness, and emotional isolation, this vision of a contextually relevant Christian spirituality offers not just a theology of God, but also a theology of healing. This may be an answer to the therapeutic culture coming from the “subjective turn” (Taylor 1991), as it is in the center of Jesus’ words: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV).

This culture, focused highly on individual benefit, springs from the perception of time. While pre-Enlightenment cultures focused on the narratives of the past and the Enlightenment mind focused on the future, late modern cultures focus on the present. From this perspective, the present soteriology of abundant life is highly relevant as it is not merely a promise of eternal salvation or spiritual satisfaction; it is a holistic experience that attends to both emotional and relational suffering in the here and now. As Mark Teasdale (2022) puts it, loneliness, anxiety, and despair in contemporary societies are not peripheral issues, but rather, central barriers to human flourishing—and thus also to receiving and sharing the fullness of life God intends. Participating in abundant life, therefore, must include “a holistic approach to improving people’s happiness and well-being” by offering people more than “just cheering up when they feel sad,” but a deep and lasting restoration of their quality of life (Mark Teasdale 2022, p. 109).

This suggests that any credible Christian response to the mental health crisis in secular societies must embrace this redemptive logic of healing—one that is not purely therapeutic in the individualistic sense, but communal, embodied, and missional. The church is uniquely equipped to be a community where the “brokenhearted” (Ps 147:3; Isa 61:1)

are not merely soothed, but also restored, reconnected, and commissioned to participate in healing others. In this way, theology becomes therapy not by replacing medicine or psychology, but by rooting healing in God’s redemptive narrative and relational presence.

If we can show that we are concerned for the well-being of other people, not because we are seeking cultural or institutional dominance, but because working for the common good is a facet of participating in the abundant life offered through Christ, we can open a new door of engagement with the culture . . . we can find ways of building credibility even in a secular context.

(Mark Teasdale 2022, pp. 25–26)

Thus, Hall (Hall and Hall 2021) argues that spiritual maturity and inner healing are not achieved through rigid rule-keeping, but through secure attachment to God—an attachment that often requires the healing of relational wounds, emotional trauma, and false images of God inherited from dysfunctional religious or family patterns. This resonates strongly with the unmet emotional and existential needs exposed by the data in Part II above.

Such a spirituality must also deal with the dynamics of liquid modernity. As Bauman (2000) observed, individuals in our time construct and deconstruct their identities through ever-shifting desires, temporary communities, and consumerist self-projects. Any Christian response that fails to address this fluid reality risks irrelevance. A renewed spirituality must therefore be flexible enough to meet people where they are—emotionally, psychologically, existentially—without compromising theological integrity. It must speak into the affective realm as much as the cognitive, integrating practices of lament, joy, silence, and embodiment alongside proclamation and teaching.

Moreover, this renewal must include a fresh emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In many traditions, the Spirit has been the forgotten member of the Trinity—a vague force rather than a relational presence (c.f. Činčala 2024). Nevertheless, in Scripture, the Spirit is precisely the One who brings transformation (2 Cor 3:18), heals wounded hearts (Rom 5:5), intercedes in groans too deep for words (Rom 8:26), and renews the inner being (Titus 3:5). The Spirit is liquid in the best sense—adaptable, penetrating, vivifying. Just as “the wind blows wherever it pleases” (John 3:8, NIV), the Spirit is not limited to institutional frameworks but consistently meets people in their brokenness—just as Jesus did in his earthly ministry. This affirms that God’s presence is not restricted to formal religion but is often most tangible in moments of vulnerability (cf. e.g., Ps 34:18; Isa 57:15; 66:2; Matt 5:3–10), while remaining faithful to the biblical truth and communal life of the church.

Thus, we advocate for a Spirit-led (“liquid” in the Christian sense of the Spirit) relational spirituality—a model that incorporates the following:

1. Emotional and psychological healing as integral to discipleship (not peripheral to it), including honest engagement with trauma, loss, attachment wounds, and unmet needs.
2. Experiential and existential engagement with Scripture, through practices such as *lectio divina*, biblical storytelling, and therapeutic hermeneutics that read texts not just for information but for transformation.
3. Embodied worship and contemplative practices, such as silence, Christian meditation, music, and movement, offering forms of encounter that transcend rational explanation and speak to the heart. Embodied practices help in inner healing and thus increase the well-being level by connecting the explicit (rational) knowledge to the implicit (gut-level, emotional, Spirit-led) knowledge, as proposed by Hall (Hall and Hall 2021).
4. Community as a healing space, where belonging is not based on doctrinal conformity but on shared vulnerability, mutual care, and Spirit-shaped relational dynamics. We

- urge for open Christian communities that are in their core deeply missional, and therefore not judgmental but offering a space for transformative encounter with God.
5. A theology of the Spirit that empowers agency without radical individualism—where the Spirit calls and equips people not just for church work but for inner healing, ethical living, and mission in the world.
 6. A missional expression of faith that does not start with propositional truth and ends with baptism, but starts and continues with presence, compassion, empathy, and discernment of spiritual hunger in others. Then this process of spiritual growth, in which we are “loved into loving” (Hall and Hall 2021) by God through others, and others are “loved into loving” by God through us, never ends.

We offer a model that reimagines Christian spirituality not as a defensive reaction against secularization, but as a prophetic and healing presence within it. It aligns with a post-secular ethos not by mimicking it, but by responding to its underlying thirsts: for meaning, connection, healing, and transcendence. It is neither rigid nor relativistic—but “solidly liquid”: grounded in biblical faith, yet fluid enough to flow into the fractured spaces of postmodern hearts. This liquid spirituality is not submitting itself to cultural trends of liquid modernity, but it builds on cultural assumptions and transforms them through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christian liquid spirituality is not optional but urgent. If churches in secular societies are to become relevant again—not just in numbers, but in witness—they must embody this integrative approach. A theology that forgets the Spirit, neglects emotion, or avoids psychological complexity cannot meet the challenges of our post-secular time. As we have seen, secular spirituality is shallow in offering a deep transformation and profound answer to the mental health crisis, and according to the presented data, traditional forms of churches are failing in this, as well. However, a Spirit-led, relational, emotionally honest Christian spirituality may just be the stream of living water needed in a dry and anxious age.

4. Conclusions

While institutionalized religion in its current form is losing its voice, unable to reach emerging generations, the rise of alternative and secular spiritualities reveals both a challenge and an invitation. This current trend in spiritual life reflects the cultural shifts of the age of liquid modernity, yet new forms of alternative spirituality may rarely provide the depth of healing, connection, and transformation that the human soul seeks amidst the deteriorating data on mental well-being. On the other hand, traditional religious institutions, in their rigid or culturally outdated forms, fail to offer solutions to the inner suffering and relational needs of post-secular people.

This article has traced the contours of this shifting spiritual landscape and argued for a renewed Christian spirituality that is biblically rooted, psychologically informed, and culturally responsive. Drawing on the framework of relational spirituality and the metaphorical richness of “liquid faith,” we have proposed a model that integrates theological integrity, emotional healing, and missional adaptability. Christian spirituality, if it is to remain credible today, must become a useful, lived—not just an academic—theology of healing, where grace and love are embodied, the person of the Holy Spirit is welcomed as the transforming presence of God, and abundant life is not just proclaimed for the afterlife, but can be embraced even today. Therefore, the church is called to become a safe sanctuary of renewal, offering a liquid spirituality in times of existential thirst.

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