Anna Daszewska’s book is devoted to the conception of the sociology of religion as conceived by Robert Wuthnow (born 1946), a prominent American sociologist and political scientist of global prominence. It attempts to explain in a holistic manner both the theoretical aspects of the sociology of religion and the multiple empirical studies on the religiosity of American society. Daszewska makes a profound exploration, systematisation and interpretation of Wuthnow’s sociological works. They deserve recognition for their theoretical and explicative qualities, as well as for the fact that they encompass analyses of religiosity, culture and politics. Two basic methods, the historical and comparative-constructivist one, have been applied in the compilation of the very rich material.

Anna Daszewska has attempted to reconstruct Robert Wuthnow’s conception of the sociology of religion and has presented the main research themes of his sociology of religion. This prominent contemporary American sociologist of religion, even if he did not create a new, comprehensive and sociological theory of religion and the sociology of religion, he diagnosed very extensively and deeply the religiosity of the American society (religious communities, new religious movements, religious pluralism, spirituality and other socio-religious phenomena).

The study is based on 50 texts by this Author (mainly books), supplemented by works on Wuthnow and presented in the context of the rich literature on the subject (250 items, mainly foreign language). The theoretical assumptions of Wuthnow’s sociology of religion and his sociological research on religiosity and spirituality are very competently presented and interpreted.

The entire study consists of six chapters: Chapter I – Theoretical Foundations of the Sociology of Religion; Chapter II – Religion, Churches, Denominations; Chapter III – Main Parameters of Religious Life; Chapter IV – Culture and Religion; Chapter V – Religion and Spirituality; Chapter VI – Reception of Robert Wuthnow’s Work. The six chapters are completed by a Conclusion and a Bibliography. The methodological design of the work is correct, and it serves well to present theoretical considerations and empirical research.

Wuthnow’s sociological interests are very broad and concern religion, churches and denominations, religion in civil society, the parameters of religious life, religion in the context of culture, politics, and spirituality. In his research, he examines the relationships between the components, analyses in depth the various forms of religious discourse, presents the cultural and historical background of events, and ultimately portrays a factual picture of American religion and social life. Anna Daszewska has investigated the main research themes of Wuthnow’s sociology of religion in great detail and in a precise manner. They show that religious commitment in the USA is still very high, higher than in many European countries. This religiosity is undergoing a slow transformation. For example, religious belief is becoming increasingly a private matter, and the source of authority in religious matters lies less and less with religious institutions, depending more on the beliefs of an individual person.

Robert Wuthnow presents a definition of religion in the form of four systems of meaning, each of which provides a different understanding of the meaning and purpose of American life. Meaning systems define the fundamental forces that govern human life. The four symbolic meaning systems are: the theistic mode (God governs human life), individualism (the individual is responsible for their own life), social science (human life is governed by social forces), and mysticism (understanding it is beyond human capacity). In American society, a shift away from a God-bound and individualistic value system towards a scientific and mystical approach is evident.

The American sociologist sees religion as a kind of code visible in religious discourse. Religious rituals, behaviour and feelings of people of faith

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are studied, but the analysis of statements, texts and informal conversations about religion provides the most information. The cognitive patterns, metaphors and narratives that are part of religion are studied. Religion establishes the moral order in the American society, gives individuals an identity, urges responsibility towards themselves and others, and has a function of integrating the American society.

The study of civil religion, which is fundamental to understand the public expression of the sacred in the United States, also plays an important role in gaining knowledge about the American society. Its function is to sustain national identity and to define the major purposes of the state, which are always legitimised by core concepts of transcendent reality. Public religion also defines who is a member of the country and helps to identify individuals by juxtaposing them with other groups and values considered negative.

Wuthnow sees theory as a set of sensitising concepts which are helpful in seeing the meaning in empirical findings and serve as a tool in religious studies. His strategy is to experiment with partially overlapping frames of reference to assess their strengths, weaknesses, similarities and differences, and then to present an eclectic approach to cultural analysis. The American sociologist would be reluctant to call his work in the sociology of religion a separate paradigm or theory, but only an emphasis on the structural aspects of culture.

According to Wuthnow, a secularisation process is not taking place in the United States. The institutional basis of religion in America is deeply rooted in the wider social environment and its orientation is towards active engagement in the secular world. Religion has adapted to the changing social situation, and this adaptation is the most important for understanding its revitalisation and the role of religion in the third sector. There has been a shift in the functioning of religion in a more limited sphere, but the majority of American society still believes in God and adheres to the Christian religion. The American sociologist Robert Wuthnow relates spirituality to the beliefs and actions through which an individual relates their lives to God, a divine being, or some other concept of transcendence, and identifies three forms of spirituality: spirituality of dwelling, spirituality of seeking and spirituality of practice. The spirituality of dwelling is linked to the family home, to customs, to the God who is worshipped in the houses of prayer, churches, synagogues, mosques. This spirituality functions in specific spaces of human life. According to Wuthnow, spirituality continues to develop within institutional and community contexts. It may or may not be sanctioned by church authorities. People presenting this type of religiosity often describe themselves as religious. Many of them do not stop thinking of faith in terms of religious participation, even if church institutions are not able to demand total loyalty from their members (absolutism and prescriptivism diminish). Without shared religious practices and outside the church community, it is difficult to maintain a personal religious identity.

The spirituality of seeking is a form of spirituality in which individuals negotiate their own personal relationship with the sacred (self-expression, creativity). Faith is not an element of inheritance from generation to generation, but a personal achievement. Each individual must work out their own path to salvation based on their own experiences. Seeking individuals talk about making their own decisions, they feel entitled to express their own views about the sacred. This type of relationship with the sacred can be defined in opposition to religion, with its organisational structure of religious beliefs and practices. Many modern people reject organised religion in favour of individual spirituality. Spirituality which exists outside the religious dimension is referred to as secular (non-religious) spirituality. Individuals liberate themselves from religious authorities, the basis of their faith becomes personal experience (faith tested by the individual). In the spirituality of seeking, the boundaries between the sacred and profane become blurred.

The spirituality of seeking appeared at one point to be an alternative for people disappointed with conventional religion, as it made it possible to combine different faith traditions, to base religious beliefs on personal experience. However, it turned out that many people still feel lost and tired of the constant search and the lack of a concrete spiritual reference. The spiritual search has begun to be criticised for its shallow consumer mentality, looking for easy solutions and unwillingness to work hard on spiritual development. The alternative is spirituality of practice. On the surface, it appears similar to the spirituality of seeking, as it may be concerned with combining traditions or a weaker contact with the church. The difference, however, is that the spirituality of practice requires a total, conscious, diligent and routine commitment by the individual to repetitive activities aimed at developing the relationship with God. The effort that practitioners of spirituality put into their routines goes hand in hand with their emphasis on the value of these endeavours. The works and lives of artists often become models for the American public to emulate and seek deeper spirituality of practice.

Wuthnow does not advocate for an alternative: religiosity or spirituality, also the latter option can draw and take on elements from religious traditions, albeit to a limited extent and in a different way than people performing the spirituality of dwelling do. A person seeking spiritual development can take advantage of many offerings, including those prepared by religious institutions. Everything is allowed to a certain extent. People who distance themselves from organised religions do not have to convert to secularism; they can adopt forms of eclectic spirituality that guarantee an authentic path to their self and the sacred. Spirituality can be expressed in a variety of ways. We are not sure whether the vitality of organised religions will increase
alongside the growing interest in spirituality. The idea that a person can be spiritual without being religious is gaining in popularity, which certainly does not have to mean that most people will become spiritual and non-religious.

Since the late 1960s, the social world has changed to such an extent that it could no longer be conceived of as stable, as a home. Traditional spirituality, associated with sacred places, gave way to another form of spirituality, i.e. the spirituality of seeking. The spirituality of seeking fits well in the cultural complexity of the American society. It has also found expression in the New Age movement. The relationship between religion and spirituality was explored in greater depth by Wuthnow in his book *Creative Spirituality. The Way of the Artist* (London 2001), in which he argues that the relationship between religion and spirituality is quite close, and that the radical separation of these spheres is illusory. He proves the above thesis by examining how contemporary artists connect the art they practice with spirituality and how art influences other people's spiritual development (art equals spirituality). In his research, Wuthnow presents artists as the spiritual vanguard of our times, and art as a kind of spiritual practice. In other works he also points out the strong links between art and spiritual development. Those who put a lot of effort into developing their own spirituality are also more likely to engage in voluntary work.

The sociology of religion features prominently in Robert Wuthnow's work, but he also focuses on the sociology of culture and the sociology of politics. Sociology of religion is a very well-established sociological sub-discipline concerned with the study of the relationship between beliefs and religious participation, religious movements, the social characteristics of congregations and the emergence of various religious subcultures. Wuthnow's sociological research connects at certain points with cultural anthropology, political science, psychology and history. In the reviewed study, Daszewska brought out all these connections, showed the theoretical background of Wuthnow's sociology of religion and described the research fields of this sociology at great length.

Robert Wuthnow is relatively little known in Poland, his works have not been translated into Polish, and he deserves interest in his sociology of religion. Bringing his works closer to the Polish reader may enrich the Polish sociology of religion, both in the theoretical and, above all, in the empirical layer. Anna Daszewska's sociological study is a fully mature dissertation, correct in the theoretical and methodological sense, based on the rich source material, showing in an analytical and synthetic way the work of the great American scholar.