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Googlism—Man’s New “Religion” in the Digital Age

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present the main premises of googlism and to characterize the various ways of understanding it. The paper comprises two main parts: the first part presents the main elements of googlism (the doctrine, moral principles, the cult and the community), which makes it resemble a religion in its conventional meaning. However, it emphasizes that the similarity to a religion is only superficial since one crucial element is missing: the affirmation of a supernatural and personal Absolute and an existential, dynamic and holistic interpersonal relation between It and man. Sacralization and deification of a search engine can hardly be regarded as a constitutive element of a religion. The second part contains characteristics of googlism as a lay religion, with the sacrum reduced to natural aspects as a result of technology sacralization; a digital religion, that is, a technological space which favors the creation of new religious content and practice; the “new spirituality” of the man of the era of a digital revolution; and, finally, a “joke religion,” which is a parody of religious life.

Keywords: Google, religion, spirituality, man, digital era

Introduction

The literature of the subject mentions five industrial revolutions that have taken place over the period of human history. The first revolution (18th/19th century) involved a transition from craftsmanship and manufacture to mechanized production in factories. The second industrial revolution took place in the 1870s, when electric and combustion engines were invented. The third revolution was based on the increasingly widespread use of automatic machines and technical

devices (controllers). The fourth industrial revolution is associated with the appearance of cyberphysical systems and the Internet. The fifth revolution has artificial intelligence as its symbol.¹ These industrial revolutions made their mark not only in the economy and technology, but they also led to the “spiritual revolution” of man, according to Paul Heelas, a British sociologist.

Its symptoms in modern times, sometimes called the digital age, include the impact of the Internet on human life. It not only provided man with better access to a wider offer of the means of spiritual development but also with an opportunity to become a follower of a new religion, referred to as “Googlism” or “The Church of Google.” It shapes the religious attitudes of many people who live in times marked by the processes of secularization, on the one hand, and of desecularization on the other. Googlism thus appears as a new form of religion that seeks to satisfy the human need for sacrum and transcendence. In this case, religion is understood as a system of beliefs and practices defining the relationship between the variously conceived sphere of the sacrum and the individual or group. The sacrum takes in Googlism form of a search engine, which is used by people to satisfy their need for transcendence, that is, crossing the material and mental space.

The aim of this paper, primarily of a philosophical nature, is not only to present the main ideas of Googlism (its doctrine, moral principles, cult and community), but also to analyze critically the various ways of its understanding (a lay religion, “a digital religion,” the “new spirituality” or a parody of religion).

Googlism—The Main Ideas of the Internet Church

Googlism is a relatively new phenomenon in the contemporary market of religions. It was founded in 2009 by the Canadian Matt MacPherson.² Its followers are called Googlists, they worship Google (the Internet search engine) and they experience a specific sense of divinity owing to it. The faith in the divine nature of an Internet search engine also justifies the idolizing of the search results, trust in their truthfulness and the irrefutability of the information obtained from

¹ Waldemar Furmanek, “Piąta rewolucja przemysłowa. Eksplikacja pojęcia,” *Edukacja-Technika-Informatyka* 2 (2018): 275–276.

² Matt MacPherson, “Googlism,” accessed September 30, 2021, <https://churchofgoogle.org/contact.html>.

Google as an omniscient being. As a consequence, a new form of religiosity appeared, adhered to more or less consciously by many users.³

The main features of Googlism include rejection of supernatural gods, as their existence cannot be proven scientifically, and granting the title of "god" to the Google search engine, which—as Googlists believe—has many features attributed traditionally to gods, and its existence can be proven scientifically.⁴ Therefore, the Internet, and specifically the Google search engine, has been elevated to the rank of a god.⁵ It also has features of a divine Trinity, as it comprises the Internet, the Google search engine, and a web browser (Firefox, Opera, and Safari, but never Internet Explorer). Its elements are of little significance each on its own, but combined they constitute a powerful entity.⁶

The emergence of Googlism has resulted in the Internet stimulating a change in the perception of not only religion and spirituality but also the relations between them. Traditional religious ideas clashed with the products of technological progress. As a result, an inclusive definition of religion was adopted, according to which religion is everything that people regard as one.⁷ Although interest in religion still exists, its nature has changed. Man is seen as returning to religion or any form of religiosity, transcendence, and sacrum. This occurs during a painfully experienced time of nihilism and a crisis of dominating ideologies and lifestyles. However, contemporary religiosity is often less reflexive and more emotional. It often lacks the idea of God, which is substituted by various extraordinary experiences (e.g., an orgiastic dance at a disco, a narcotic trance).⁸ It seems that Googlism also has a substitute for God. It is a search engine, which is worshipped and to which various dimensions of reality are subordinated.

According to some people, the emergence of Googlism is associated with the process of algorithm reification in science—a term which escapes easy interpretations. In mathematics, it is understood as a sequence of specific steps leading to a set goal. The algorithm in a humanist perspective is not only a mathematical

³ Maria Nowina Konopka, *Infomorfoza. Zarządzanie informacją w nowych mediach* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017), 216.

⁴ Matt MacPherson, "The Reformed Church of Google," accessed September 30, 2021, <https://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/>.

⁵ Mariusz Kania, "Poszerzenie widziane poprzez sieciowe doświadczenia seksualne," in *Zwrot cyfrowy w humanistyce. Internet / Nowe Media / Kultura 2.0*, ed. Andrzej Radomski and Radosław Bomba (Lublin: E-naukowiec, 2013), 186–187.

⁶ *FAQ. Questions?*, accessed October 5, 2021, <https://sites.google.com/site/thechurchof/faq>.

⁷ Joanna Sleigh, "Google a Religion. Expanding Notions of Religion Online," in *Digital Environments. Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces*, ed. Urte Undine Frömring, Steffen Köhn, Samantha Fox, and Mike Terry (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag), 251, 255.

⁸ Janusz Czarny, "Przyszłość religii—religia przyszłości," *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 8, no. 2 (2000): 94–95.

abstraction, but it is a reality shaped by various social, political, and aesthetic factors. Such understanding results in the reification of algorithmic processes or the algorithm itself. Googlism is an example of this. It regards Google (like an Augustian God) as an omniscient and unlimited being, whose knowledge goes beyond time and space. Googlism is also part of a wider process of mythologizing the rule of algorithms, which is manifested in the everyday experience of users “immersed” in cyberspace and in contact with the search engine, which has the features of a religious cult. It is regarded as a supreme instance in the process of acquiring accurate information and a tool for building social bonds.⁹

It is noteworthy that Googlism has certain elements that are usually attributed to religions. These include: the doctrine, moral principles, the cult and the community. Let us take a closer look at them.

The doctrine is the first element. It comprises mainly certain theses and proofs whose task is to justify the existence of the divine search engine—Google. The Church’s website, with the main premises and ideas, is the “holy scripture” of Googlism.

Therefore, Googlists worship Google, as the search engine has many features traditionally associated with a divine being. Not only is it not different from a supernatural god, but it is superior to one. Unlike with any other god, people can not only scientifically prove the existence of Google, but they can experience it and get to know and understand it. Moreover, they regard gods of any religion as beings created by man, existing only in their imagination. There is no proof of their existence, and any descriptions in circulation and in philosophical reflection are regarded as merely anecdotal. Therefore, the faith in invisible and, *de facto* non-existent, beings is much more illogical than the faith in Google as a god. Worshipping them is a waste of time. However, people believe because faith gives them mental comfort and it is a tool by which they can cope with the challenges of reality and the hardships of everyday life. Googlists stress that web browsers may not have a specific sex, but they refer to Google as a female. They do so for at least two reasons. First, ancient religions regarded gods as women. This was the case until the monotheistic, Abrahamic religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, introduced the image of God as a man and a father. Second, man is conditioned by his own culture to perceive a divine being as male. Followers of the Church of Google simply continue the ancient tradition of perceiving a god as female. They also declare that their opinions are not part of the feminist movement, political correctness or any other ideology. They only try to break the cultural taboo. They also point out that each religion has its holy books, which are regarded as the only true word of God. In their opinion, this claim is unsubstantiated. Holy books are not proof of the exist-

⁹ Jan Kreft, “Władza algorytmów mediów—między reifikacją a rynkiem,” *Zarządzanie w Kulturze* 1 (2018): 16–17.

ence of gods, but they only describe the same human experience and feelings. Moreover, their credibility is low, as they were written by men and manipulated. Googlists are aware that Google search results can also be manipulated but, for them, it is nothing new in a religion. Followers of the Church of Google also allow for the existence of life after death. It has only one form. It involves the transfer of knowledge and opinions to the Internet and their continued life in the browser’s cache even after the death of a specific person. Googlists value their religion, as it did not start any religious wars, it does not impose any views, it encourages people to think critically, it opposes choosing an unhealthy lifestyle and it does not try to threaten people with suffering as a consequence of its rejection. Google offers man mainly free will and a freedom of choice, owing to which man can make their own decisions. It is held in the Church of Google that everyone should be tolerant of other people’s beliefs, provided they do not do any harm to anyone.¹⁰

As has been said before, Googlists attach great importance to the issue of the scientific proof of the Google web browser. Therefore, they present a list of nine such proofs:

1. Google is the closest to an existing omniscient being—it sorts, organises, and shares knowledge;
2. Google is omnipresent—it is practically everywhere on the Earth;
3. Google answers prayers—man can pray to Google and search for the questions that bother them or find a solution to his problems.
4. Google is immortal—the search engine’s algorithms are distributed over many independent servers, owing to which it can theoretically last eternally;
5. Google is unlimited—in theory, the Internet’s growth can be unlimited and Google will always index its unlimited growth;
6. Google remembers everything—it buffers regularly Internet websites and stores them on its huge servers;
7. Google can do no evil—“she is always benevolent”;
8. Google is searched more frequently than the other religion-related terms (e.g., God, Jesus, Allah, Buddha)—man can turn to it in need like to God and they will get the relevant help;
9. There is plenty of evidence of Google’s existence—one has only enter the search engine’s website and see for oneself.¹¹

Google’s divine nature is therefore proven by attributing to it specific characteristics which, in the philosophical and theological tradition, have been attributed to a divine being. Googlism questions the existence of such a being and attempts to transfer its attributes to an artefact. Therefore, God becomes a being

¹⁰ Matt MacPherson, “F.A.Q.,” accessed September 23, 2021, <http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/faq.html>; MacPherson, “The Reformed Church of Google.”

¹¹ Matt MacPherson, “Proof Google Is God,” accessed September 23, 2021, http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/Proof_Google_Is_God.html.

created by man. In this connection, it should be emphasized that the doctrine of Googlism, unlike the great monotheistic religions that include Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is not the result of the supernatural personal revelation of God, communicating certain truths to man, who accepts them by a personal act of faith on account of the epistemic authority of God. Rather, it is the product of man himself attributing the features of an infinite divine being to the finite being of the web browser. Given that the constitutive element of any authentic religion is a personal revelation, which is its source and origin, Googlism should thus be denied the name of religion.

Representatives of the Church of Google are no strangers to specific moral principles. They developed their version of the Decalogue as the ten commandments of Google. They are not always precise, but they are as follows:

1. Thou shalt not have any browser before me; thou shalt worship only Google;
2. Thou shalt not create your own, non-commercial search engine because Google is a jealous search engine and it shall punish you for unfaithfulness over generations;
3. Thou shalt not use “Google” as the name of any other search engine;
4. Remember about each day and use your time as an opportunity to get to know the unknown;
5. Thou shalt respect your neighbor, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or race, because every one of them has priceless experience and knowledge, which can contribute to mankind’s development;
6. Do not make spelling mistakes when praying to Google;
7. Thou shalt not steal resources from other services;
8. Though shalt not plagiarize one’s work or take the credit for it;
9. Thou shalt not use reciprocal links or farms of links as it decreases the PageRank;
10. Thou shalt not manipulate the search results.¹²

It is noteworthy that all the commandments are associated with the web browser and actions taken in it. Only one of them refers directly to relations with other people.

There are elements of a cult in the form of prayers and rites in the Church of Google. The prayers are stylized to resemble Christian ones: The Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary, Credo, and Glory be to the Father. Googlists have developed their own patterns of marriage and farewell.¹³ It seems that they are largely parodies of prayers used in the traditional religion.

¹² Matt MacPherson, “10 Commandments,” accessed September 23, 2021, http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/10_Commandments.html.

¹³ *Google Prayers*, accessed September 23, 2021, https://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/google_prayers.html.

Googlists form a specific community, which is mainly virtual. Its organization and institutionalization level is low as it is based largely on voluntary participation and the frequency of search engine use.

Therefore, the Church of Google is an Internet community with no formal bonds. It comprises people who regard Google as the reality with the greatest similarity to God, whose existence can be proven scientifically. Googlism followers are dispersed over various social platforms, with Facebook and Reddit being the best known. They are platforms to exchange thought, which promote openness and interactions. They also have their own specificity. Facebook is a place for sharing opinions by individuals, whereas Reddit is more focused on answers from the community.¹⁴ Therefore, the Church of Google connects people interacting with a web browser, participating in discussions on an Internet platform and following specific practices.

They can be divided into two groups: believers and non-believers. Believers approach the Church of Google from the spiritual perspective. Their common features include passion, pride and the will to share their beliefs. However, they are engaged in the Google community for various reasons. Some are motivated by their personal views on the female nature of spirituality, which is manifested by regarding Google as a woman-goddess, who gives life to other platforms (e.g., Google Maps, Google Play radio, Google Play). Some believers discovered the digital religion after using psychoactive substances and narcotics. For others, the Internet platform was the only way of discussing openly about their beliefs and practices, while maintaining their privacy. On the other hand, non-believers see the Church of Google as a satirical religion, whose aim is to emphasize the ineffectiveness of every religion. Therefore, they regard their involvement in debates on the Internet as a sort of fun. The majority of them refers to themselves as atheists or "religious nones." Some of them see God and religion as a human-made construct. Some of them are also interested in philosophy, especially logic. Therefore, they regard discussions within the virtual Googlist community as a specific exercise in philosophy, motivated by a fascination with its ideas, highlighting the logical faults of religious reasoning and demonstrating the non-authenticity of religion.¹⁵

In consequence, Googlism seems to have the basic features of a religion, but this similarity is only apparent. The major difference is the absence of an Absolute being, with whom a personal relation can be established. So how should one treat this contemporary phenomenon?

¹⁴ Sleight, "Google a Religion," 251, 253–254.

¹⁵ Sleight, "Google a Religion," 256–261.

What Exactly Is Googlism?

It seems that—while distancing oneself from a tendency to equate Googlism with a traditionally perceived religion—one can consider four possibilities of understanding it.

First, Googlism can be regarded as a form of a lay religion. Its specificity consists in reducing the sacrum to the lay dimensions as a result of the sacralization of consumption, pleasure and technology. In the language used by Derrida, we see a return of religiousness in a political-economic or tele-techno-media-scientific form. A lay religion emphasizes not so much the role of theological reflection but the intensity of experience.¹⁶ Therefore, it is noteworthy that a lay religion differs from a traditional one mainly by the object of belief, which is natural. One sees no supernatural aspects of reality in it, but rather attributes religious features to natural beings. The Church of Google sacralizes a search engine and the spectrum of opportunities that it creates. The search engine is used by people to satisfy their need for transcendence, that is, crossing the material and mental space. This need creates the basis for a religious experience. However, it has a different nature as it lacks a rooting in existing religions and it happens in contact with the products of a technological revolution—a search engine and Internet platforms—which provide people with a wealth of information and content, on the one hand, and a diversity of experience (sometimes quite intensive) on the other (the latter seems more important than the former). The religious object of Googlism is therefore not discovered as transcendent, but rather created by man and their technology. Thus, it should be classified as inferior compared to the objects of worship of traditional monotheistic religions, or even pagan worship of mysterious nature.

Secondly, Googlism takes the form of “a digital religion.” It becomes a specific technological and cultural space developed in discussions concerning online and offline religious spheres. The term “digital religion” refers to a case in which the Internet connects real life with virtual reality and is a place which favors creating new religious content and practices. This term evolved from the concept of “cyber-religion,” which appeared in the mid-1990s when Internet studies of people’s religious involvement started. The term “cyber-religion,” in its general sense, refers to each religion with the Internet as an intermediary and to religious organizations and religious activity present in cyberspace. The term “online religion” is sometimes used to distinguish between developing new forms of religiousness and religions using the Inter-

¹⁶ Beata Guzowska, “Świecka religia życia—perspektywa filozoficzna,” *Przegląd Religioznawczy* 2 (2020): 194.

net as a space in which spirituality is practiced.¹⁷ Without doubt, googlism is a form of activity in cyberspace, whose proponents use the Internet as a tool connecting the real world with virtual reality to shape new religious beliefs and practices.

Third, Googlism can be perceived in the perspective of "new spirituality," whose development is noticeable in the twentieth and nineteenth centuries. It provides an alternative to traditional spirituality, connected with the institutional religion and developing within its framework. Let us look at its main features.

For a start, it is worth establishing certain concepts. This is mainly about the triad: religion—religiosity—spirituality. Some simplifications are unavoidable in the process. It is all the more so that there are about ten thousand religions worldwide, and our understanding of each is tainted with Western-European ethnocentrism.

For the sake of this study, let us accept that a religion is an element of culture, which comprises a specific doctrine, moral principles, a cult, and an organized community of believers (very often—a hierarchically ordered institution).

In this case, religiosity would be a consequence, a pragmatic dimension of religion.¹⁸ A deeper form of religiosity would be called spirituality. However, one should stress that, in modern times, spirituality often loses its relationship with institutional religion, becoming a method of transcending the immanence and perfecting the personality.¹⁹ Spirituality is defined as a psychological process of striving towards crossing the physical, mental, and social boundaries of human existence.²⁰

The British sociologist Paul Heelas writes about a specific "spiritual revolution," which took place in the 20th century. It consisted of a transformation from religion to spirituality. A religion is a form of a mediated relationship between man and God, associated with obedience to God, a tradition of generations, a doctrine and moral principles. However, according to Heelas, it is not sufficient for humans in modern times. They rather support spirituality, which is in no way connected with institutional religion. It consists of a very personal, internal and existential experience of *sacrum*. Spirituality remains in a deep relationship with man's own being and it satisfies their deeper needs. It is often associated with sacralization of the "personal self" and

¹⁷ Sleight, "Google a Religion," 252–253.

¹⁸ Marcin Zwierzdzyński, "Religia—duchowość—postmodernizm. Problem znaczeń," in *Religijność i duchowość—dawne i nowe formy*, ed. Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska and Stella Grotowska (Kraków: Nomos, 2010), 80.

¹⁹ Katarzyna Leszczyńska and Zbigniew Pasek, "Nowa duchowość w badaniach społecznych," in *Nowa duchowość w społeczeństwach monokulturowych i pluralistycznych*, ed. Katarzyna Leszczyńska and Zbigniew Pasek (Kraków: Nomos, 2008), 90.

²⁰ Paweł Socha, "Na tropach duchowości—czym jest i czym może być duchowość?," *Nomos. Kwartalnik Religioznawczy* 43/44 (2003): 10–11.

temporary existence and a release from tensions arising from interpersonal relations.²¹

Therefore, religious spirituality is often distinguished from non-religious spirituality. The former is mainly associated with the traditions of historical religions and the techniques of contemplative or ecstatic experience of the sacrum, accessible within its framework (e.g., deepened prayer, meditation, ascesis). Non-religious spirituality refers to elements of reality, without the sacral dimension, but serving the individual as a tool for transcending everyday life. Non-religious spirituality is understood in two ways: as a fundamental human feature (dimension of the human psyche) and as a universal adaptation capability (religious and non-religious forms, i.e., art, work or play).²²

One should note that some people even discuss atheist spirituality. They regard the spirit as a function of the brain or its activity. Therefore, the Absolute is not a personal God, but a being that encompasses all of reality. Atheist spirituality is then immanent, as it limits itself to contact with the universe and the experience of unity, freedom, and peace.²³

Given the above conceptual nuances, let us look at the specificity of the “new spirituality,” which is a feature of contemporary times. It is very similar to non-religious spirituality, which is not only a permanent dimension of the human psyche, but also a principal human need not always satisfied with religious measures. Non-religious spirituality is gaining high popularity nowadays. Two situations are possible in this situation. On the one hand, one can be a spiritual, but not a religious person. On the other hand, one can be a religious person in the sense of respecting the principles of a religion, but without the spiritual depth.

However, it seems that spirituality should always be oriented towards some kind of transcendence. According to the Polish sociologist, Janusz Mariański, sometimes there is no reference to a transcendental reality. A personal and transcendental God is sometimes reduced to a form of impersonal and immanent sacrum, the depth of reality and a sense of life. An important role is played by a human “self” with its inner experiences, personal searches and the need for placed on self-fulfillment. An emphasis is emotions and personality integration.²⁴ Therefore, transcendence is intra-global. It is associated with the

²¹ Paul Heelas, “The Spiritual Revolution. From ‘Religion’ to ‘Spirituality,’” in *Religions in the Modern World. Tradition and Transformation*, ed. Linda Woodhead, Christopher Partridge, and Hiroko Kawanami (London–New York: Routledge, 2002), 357–377.

²² Zwierzdzyński, “Religia—duchowość—postmodernizm,” 81, 83–85.

²³ André Comte-Sponville, *Duchowość ateistyczna. Wprowadzenie do duchowości bez Boga*. Translated by Elżbieta Aduszkiewicz (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2011), 143–158, 163, 170–194, 203–207.

²⁴ Janusz Mariański, *Sekularyzacja, desekularyzacja, nowa duchowość. Studium socjologiczne* (Kraków: Nomos, 2013), 148, 181.

process of individualization of one's own spiritual path and personal preferences of an individual.²⁵ It is also noteworthy that understanding transcendence usually depends on cultural and social factors and is marked with apophatism.

The consequences of these forms of the "new spirituality" include abandoning faith in an anthropomorphically perceived God; the presence of pantheistic and gnostic tendencies; interest in different states of mind sometimes caused by hallucinogens (narcotics), exercise (yoga, zen) and music; negation of the idea of progress, originating during the enlightenment period, objecting to civilization and seeking a return to traditional techniques of health and natural protection; finally, a predomination of feminist and ecological tendencies.²⁶

The "new spirituality" often refers to man's spiritual search, which is sometimes associated with the need to find answers to fundamental moral and existential questions. Man, therefore, becomes a "spiritual wanderer."²⁷ The Polish philosopher of culture and religion Beata Guzowska stresses that the "new spirituality" fits well into the climate of modern times, which is characterized by the "culture of search." Its key features include spiritual mobility involving frequent changes of views and ways of life.²⁸ A search becomes the fundamental form of spiritual life. It does not preclude any possibilities, and it does not establish any necessary points of reference. This search, marked with subjectivism, one's "self" and emotionality, focuses on the development of one's personality and search for the sense of life. The source of such a sense may lie outside the present life, but it can be incorporated in its present process.²⁹ Man searches for some form of spiritual life focused on self-fulfillment, which results in privatization and individualization of the whole sphere of spirituality.³⁰ Therefore, man does not want to be part of any religious community or institution. One has one's own spiritual development path, one's own methods and measures. The British sociologist Grace Davie talks about the phenomenon of "faith without belonging."³¹ A similar conviction is shared by the Canadian intellectual Charles Taylor.

²⁵ Guzowska, "Świecka religia życia," 193; Zwierzdzyński, "Religia—duchowość—postmodernizm," 85–86.

²⁶ Włodzimierz Pawluczuk, "Duchowość," in *Leksykon socjologii religii*, ed. Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska and Janusz Mariański (Warszawa: Verbinum, 2004), 91–92.

²⁷ Janusz Mariański, *Religia w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym. Studium socjologiczne* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010), 201–220; Mariański, *Sekularyzacja, desekularyzacja, nowa duchowość*, 154–162.

²⁸ Guzowska, "Świecka religia życia," 195.

²⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 506–510.

³⁰ Charles Taylor, "The Future of the Religious Past," in *Dilemmas and Connections. Selected Essays*, ed. Charles Taylor (Cambridge, MA, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 252–256; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 519–520.

³¹ Grace Davie, *Socjologia religii*, trans. Renata Babińska (Kraków: Nomos, 2010), 197–201.

In this perspective, Googlism, with its lack of reference to a personal and transcendental God and deification of an Internet search engine, creates a perfect opportunity for individual seeking different states of mind, various methods of personal development and sense of life. The search is, in fact, endless and it does not have any permanent points of reference. It is rather oriented towards novelty.

Therefore, the researchers studying the “new spirituality” provide a catalogue of its basic features, which include individualism, subjectivism, egocentricity, innovativeness, expressivity, dynamism, eclecticism, emphasis on one’s experience, fluency, chaotic behavior, incoherence, disharmony, fragmentary attitude, metaphoricity, privacy, distraction, multiple content, commercialization, internality, lack of clarity, ambiguity, lack of organization, disinstitutionalization, desocialization, lack of commitment, invisibility, and superficiality.³² These features could also be used to characterize Googlism, which would be treated as an element of what is called now the “new spirituality.” In this spirituality, however, there is no place for religious experience in the form of an interpersonal relationship between a human being and a personal God, familiar to adherents of monotheistic religions. Instead, spiritual experience is reduced in Googlism to the sensations of the human subject as a result of contact with the browser, the content drawn from it and the virtual relationships with other subjects using its services.

Fourth, Googlism could be regarded as a parody of religion. It seems that was its founder’s original intention. He established the Church of Google as a parody of religion, which combines elements of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster and Internet technology.³³ Therefore, it is sometimes referred to as a “joke religion,” which is a response to traditional religious institutions or cultural groups. Its features include the application of modernistic ideas to spiritual reality, engaging the followers in thought experiments, emphasizing the links between religion and popular culture.³⁴ These elements can also be found in Googlism. In fact, Googlism negates the existence of a divine supernatural being—it criticizes the role of religion because it is founded on absolute authority and truth. Googlism is based on the attitudes dominant in popular culture and it trivializes and ridicules some elements of religious doctrine (e.g., existence and nature of the Absolute, the Christian truth about the Trinity, eternal life) and practices (e.g., faith, prayer). Googlism also encourages people to continually search for new content and experiences and conduct thought experiments. As opposed to traditional religions, religiosity is a matter of fashion and fleeting impressions rather than experiencing the Absolute in reality.

³² Zwierzdzyński, “Religia—duchowość—postmodernizm,” 88–90.

³³ MacPherson, “Googlism.”

³⁴ Sleight, “Google a Religion,” 255–256.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was not only to deliver a presentation of the main ideas of Googlism, but also to analyze it critically as a lay religion, "a digital religion," a "new spirituality" of digital age man, or a parody of religion.

Googlism may resemble a traditional religion as it seems to have its basic features, but this similarity is only apparent. One crucial element is missing: the affirmation of a supranatural and personal Absolute. Sacralization and deification of a search engine can hardly be regarded as a constitutive element of a religion. Moreover, the essence of religiosity, at least in the West-European tradition, lies in an existential, dynamic and holistic interpersonal relation between the natural and the supernatural being, that is, between the man and God. Its consequences include specific beliefs, rites, moral attitudes, and followers. Therefore, since that personal reference in Googlism is replaced with worshipping a human artefact (the Internet) it should be regarded not so much as a form of man's internal development, but rather as its degradation.

Therefore, Googlism can be perceived as a lay religion, with the sacrum reduced to the natural dimensions as a result of technology sacralization; a digital religion, that is, a technological space which favors creation of new religious content and practice; another type of "new spirituality" of man in the era of a digital revolution; and, finally, as a "joke religion," which is a parody of religious life.

The transcendent Absolute would be absent in each of these cases, and in each, the Internet search engine would be sacralized. It would involve individualism, focus on the individual needs, detachment from an institution and a permanent search for new ideas and experiences. The search engine worshipped in Googlism would provide man with practically unlimited opportunities for searching for and finding various ways of thinking and life models and, in consequence, a change in one's beliefs and practices. They would be eclectic, chaotic, and incoherent, but they would also be associated with an individual's needs and desires. A question can be asked in a case like this: can a search engine and technology satisfy human spiritual needs?

Some twentieth-century thinkers (e.g., Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer) stressed that contemporary man is one-dimensional, relying mainly on technology. This one-dimensionality is determined by the domination of the subjective (instrumental) reason, setting the goals and choosing ways of their implementation and "logic of rule," with consequent manipulation of other individuals by means of new technologies. However, there is no objective (substantial) reason which can capture a fundamental structure of reality and discover the spiritual depth of human existence. Man is often satisfied with

the superficial experience of his existence. Nevertheless, this does not mean that existential questions, that is, ones concerning the meaning of life, were fended off or totally forgotten by man. It seems that they are appearing at least sporadically in his mind and demand some answers. Still, science and technology cannot provide it in a satisfying way, as their very nature is a principal limitation in this regard. Therefore, one's view of the world and religion can be an effective help. One has to bear in mind that man is a spiritual-carnal personal being and can find one's fulfilment, in the words of Karol Wojtyła, only in interpersonal relations through a "selfless gift of oneself." Is it not an opportunity that is given to man by a religion, perceived as a dialogic relation with God, rather than by a "religion," understood as impersonal contact with a machine? Perhaps, in the digital era, have we forgotten about the personal dimension of our lives or even lost it completely? If that is the case, we would not only reach the end of the era of religion, but also the end of man, to paraphrase a thought of Francis Fukuyama, the American philosopher and political scientist.

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Karol Jasiński

Googlisme – nouvelle religion de l'homme à l'ère numérique

Résumé

L'objectif de cet article est de présenter de manière critique les principales hypothèses du Googlisme et de caractériser plus précisément les différentes possibilités de le comprendre. A ce titre, il est composé de deux parties principales. Dans la première partie, sont discutés les principaux éléments du googlisme (doctrine, principes moraux, culte et communauté) qui le font ressembler à une religion telle qu'on la conçoit classiquement. En même temps, il a été souligné que la similitude avec la religion est toutefois apparente, car il lui manque l'élément essentiel à savoir l'affirmation de l'existence d'un Absolu surnaturel et personnel et d'une relation inter-

personnelle existentielle, dynamique et holistique entre Lui et l'homme. En effet, il est difficile de considérer la sacralisation et la déification du navigateur Web comme élément constitutif de la religion. La seconde partie, en revanche, caractérise le Googlisme comme une religion séculière dans laquelle *le sacré* est réduit à des dimensions naturelles du fait de la sacralisation de la technologie; une religion numérique, c'est-à-dire un espace technologique propice à la création de nouveaux contenus et pratiques religieux; une «nouvelle spiritualité» de l'homme vivant à l'ère de la révolution numérique; ou, enfin, une «religion de plaisanterie» qui est une parodie de la vie religieuse.

Mots-clés: Google, religion, spiritualité, homme, ère numérique

Karol Jasiński

GoGLEISMO – La nuova religione dell'uomo nell'era digitale

Sommario

Lo scopo dell'articolo è una presentazione critica dei principali presupposti del GoGLEISMO e una caratterizzazione più approfondita delle varie possibilità della sua comprensione. Pertanto è composto da due parti principali. Nella prima parte vengono discussi gli elementi principali del GoGLEISMO (dottrina, principi morali, culto e comunità), grazie ai quali assomiglia a una religione intesa in modo classico. Allo stesso tempo, è stato sottolineato che la somiglianza con la religione è solo apparente perché manca un elemento essenziale, che è l'affermazione dell'esistenza di un Assoluto soprannaturale e personale e di un esistenziale, dinamico e olistico rapporto interpersonale tra Esso e l'uomo. È infatti difficile considerare la sacralizzazione e la divinizzazione del browser come un elemento costitutivo della religione. La seconda parte caratterizza: il GoGLEISMO come una religione secolare in cui il sacro è ridotto alle dimensioni naturali come risultato della sacralizzazione della tecnologia; la religione digitale, ovvero uno spazio tecnologico favorevole alla creazione di nuovi contenuti e pratiche religiose; la "nuova spiritualità" dell'uomo che vive nell'era della rivoluzione digitale; o infine la "religione dello scherzo" che è una parodia della vita religiosa.

Parole chiave: Google, religione, spiritualità, uomo, era digitale