

Mindfulness in a Secular Age: Framing and Contextualising the Conversation in the Irish Context

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Abstract : The phenomenon of mindfulness has become ever more popular in an increasingly pluralist Western society. Mindfulness practice has penetrated secular contexts that would otherwise be closed to religious influence, including state schools, hospitals, and commerce. The contemporary understanding of mindfulness has its origins in Buddhist meditation. However, since Jon Kabat-Zinn's pioneering work in Mindfulness-Based Interventions, the concept has developed and sometimes mutated into various forms of practice which are disembedded from their original spiritual philosophy. This project will explore the spiritual climate within which mindfulness is currently flourishing through dialogue with three interlocutors. The first interlocutor is the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor whose seminal work, 'A Secular Age', outlines three distinct modes of secularity. Taylor examines how the conditions of belief have changed and how the self seeks meaning in an age where belief in the divine is no longer axiomatic. The next interlocutor is Czech theologian and psychotherapist Tomáš Halík who offers a unique perspective of a Catholic who belongs to a section of society outnumbered by secular counterparts, with a theological hermeneutic best described as 'Den Fremden verstehen- understanding the stranger'. Finally, Irish theologian Michael Paul Gallagher offers a theological perspective on how the Christian faith can be translated into dialogue with Irish secular culture, as well as addressing the crisis of imagination and culture rather than the crisis of faith in Ireland. These interlocutors will illustrate that there are sometimes striking differences in how to interpret the religious signs of the times. However, these approaches also reveal significant similarities in how they address and explore the meaning of religious belief and experience today. In this way, themes will emerge that will help to frame the conversation about mindfulness in the West. These themes will include; the failure of the secularization thesis to pass, the growth of a diverse marketplace of religions and beliefs and the growth of a demographic who identify as spiritual but not religious. Such research is paramount in enabling a richer dialogue between Christian faith and mindfulness in a fragmented, postmodern Western context.

Keywords : culture, mindfulness, secularism, spirituality

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