

Introduction

Not only to live faith, but also to think it.

—Jan Patočka

In a letter addressed to a theologian of his acquaintance, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka suggests that faith is more than practice. Faith, which in Patočka's writings always means Christianity, concerns thinking. What does it mean to associate Christianity with thinking? Does Patočka ever express his personal views concerning belief? Is he accidentally pronouncing a theological idea here? Does the proposition contain a programmatic statement? Is this a provocation indicating that faith does not think (enough)? Or, should we understand it as a challenge to think more about faith, or to think about faith in a different way? This book is launched from the midst of these questions and is to some extent an extended reflection on this single enigmatic utterance. It seeks to explore Christian faith and theology in their proximity to philosophical-phenomenological reflection and its way of thinking. The central thesis is that Patočka's thought offers a wealth of insights that both challenge and inspire theology in its own task of thinking.

Some readers may be surprised by my choice of principal interlocutor. Patočka is neither a theologian nor a philosopher of religion. If we had to describe him in a single word, it would most likely be "phenomenologist." Scholars have been interpreting Patočka's philosophical work for many years and examining him from various perspectives: as phenomenologist, political thinker, interpreter of ancient philosophy, follower of Husserl and Heidegger, expert on Comenius, philosopher of history. Patočka is variously presented as an academic philosopher of the classical school, a civil rights activist, a passionate critic of modernity, a prolific writer, the Socrates of our times, the champion of life in truth, a thinker of shocking thoughts concerning the First World War, a heretic, and perhaps even as a

forerunner of postmodernity. Patočka has many faces and his readers find many voices in his voluminous output, but rarely, it appears, the voice of theology. The motivation that lies behind this present work is to accept the challenge of finding that voice and to read, interpret, and appropriate Patočka's thought from a distinctively theological perspective.

I believe these reflections will provide an alternative and complementary perspective to the resurgence of religion and the reconsideration of Christianity in the present-day context, something otherwise described and debated as the "theological turn" in contemporary continental philosophy. The book is divided into seven chapters, each of which can be read separately as a discussion of a particular theologoumenon in Patočka, but which taken together gradually unfold the overall argument concerning the task of thinking, that is, and to paraphrase Patočka, the task not only of living Christianity but also of thinking it.

Chapter 1 tackles a long-debated question: Are theology and philosophy discrete disciplines that *font deux*? Sometimes conceived as the relationship between faith and reason, this question is scrutinized in light of Patočka's thought. The theological turn initiates a return to the question in a new context. Traditionally, theologians have reclaimed philosophical concepts for the sake of theological arguments. Now, the key players are philosophers, who retrieve theological issues and thus challenge the traditional doctrine of *philosophia ancilla theologiae*—philosophy as the handmaiden of theology. As a phenomenological philosopher, Patočka firmly rejects theological imperialism and the (mis)uses of philosophy. His early publications betray an especially polemical undertone regarding theology, and the influence of Heidegger appears indisputable in this respect. What is yet more interesting is that Patočka's apologetic for the autonomy of philosophy resembles the later critique of the theological turn in (French) phenomenology formulated by Dominique Janicaud.

That said, Patočka's thought significantly changes over the years. While anxious to identify and clarify the vocation of philosophy, Patočka increasingly acknowledges the importance of theology. He reads the prominent theologians of the day such as Rudolf Bultmann; he discusses theological issues with academic theologians, mostly of the Barthian orientation, such as Josef Lukl Hromádka and Josef B. Souček; he presents lectures for students of theology on themes such as "Christian faith and thinking"; and he is fascinated by concepts of high theological importance such as conversion, faith, the soul, and sacrifice. Ultimately, just as it is among certain representatives of the theological turn in contemporary

phenomenology, Patočka's phenomenological philosophy is open to the structures of theological thinking. Chapter 1 therefore argues for drawing Patočka into the field of theology as a complementary voice in the debate concerning the relationship between theology and philosophy, and it demonstrates that Patočka's thought opens possibilities for a theological reading and may even present a constructive critical impetus for theology and its own task of thinking.

Having established a link between the philosopher and the proposed theological reading of his work, chapter 2 presents a detailed account of the context from which Patočka speaks, namely, modernity. In Patočka, we do not find a univocal language concerning modernity, although his focus, following Husserl, is rather critical and, in the footsteps of Heidegger, perhaps even negative. Although the tone of chapter 2 echoes Patočka's critical outlook, it has to be said that the Czech philosopher is well aware that modernity represents a mass of heterogeneous ideas, varied modes of thinking, competing rationalities, and positive developments. Rather than aiming at a summary of the totality of Patočka's reflections on modernity, I therefore propose a series of "windows" that offer a variety of insights into its multifaceted nature. But there is one thread that unites these various lines of thought and provides us with a clearer perspective, and that is Patočka's perennial struggle with the idea of crisis. Although the modern crisis has numerous facets, I will confine myself to considering what I see as the three most relevant: the crisis of rationalism, the crisis of metaphysics, and the crisis of religion.

In chapters 3 and 4, I explore Patočka's critique of metaphysics in detail. Can metaphysics be overcome? Is theology possible after the demise of metaphysics? These questions are common to both the theological turn and Patočka's oeuvre, although for Patočka, the process of overcoming does not result in nonmetaphysical or even antimetaphysical closure. Chapter 3 is concerned mainly with problematizing ready-made postmetaphysical theories, especially in the field of contemporary theology. Here I will turn to the examples of Jean-Luc Marion and John D. Caputo. In dialogue with these prominent authors, it will become clear that, while rejecting metaphysical philosophy, Patočka reconsiders metaphysical thinking and thus proposes an alternative to the recent theological turn. To reinforce the claims proposed in chapter 3, chapter 4 analyzes Patočka's essay *Negative Platonism*, written in the 1950s. This work, which predated the theological turn and entered the debate as a concept, represents a unique attempt to develop a metaphysical thinking beyond the ontotheological lapsus. The

question guiding our inquiry concerns the theological significance of Patočka's metaphysical thinking. Without preempting the answer here, it is worth noting that the principal impact of Patočka's reconsideration of metaphysics is likely to be found in the field of the theology of faith, and that our insights will lead us to the question: What kind of Christianity can we associate with Patočka?

Chapter 5 tracks Patočka's deconstruction of classical Christianity and sketches the broad contours of the kind of Christianity that belongs in the past, that is, the Christianity we now find ourselves "post." But Christianity is by no means irrelevant or unimportant in a post-Christian age. On the contrary, our present context calls for a reconsideration of Christian themes. I will therefore be taking a closer look at Patočka's notion of demythologized Christianity, which for Patočka means a Christianity beyond myth and enlightenment and emancipated from both ancient *religio* and modern rationalism. I will also explore the idea of "the un-thought" and therefore aim at "thinking Christianity after (the end of) Christianity," that is, Christianity as something that is still on its way and unfolding in the future.

By the same token, Jacques Derrida engages with Patočka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. His provocative reading suggests that Patočka should be considered a Christian thinker and, in this sense, a crucial figure in the debate concerning religion in the contemporary world. Chapter 6 examines both Derrida's reading and the readings of Derrida's reading. Derrida draws on Patočka's thesis that the essence of religion in general and Christianity in particular, as the religion par excellence, is responsiveness to the Other and to others. In this sense, Derrida reveals and supports the thesis that for Patočka, Christianity is a particular form of (philosophical) thinking rather than a confessional religion.

Finally, chapter 7 explores the idea of sacrifice, an idea that is at the heart of Patočka's later works. Is it mere coincidence that the philosopher who paid the ultimate price for his opinions—the same price as Socrates, the model of philosophical life—reflected on sacrifice in the final period of his professional life? A fascinating idea of kenosis and kenotic sacrifice represents the pinnacle of Patočka's interest in Christianity and in theological issues. Such insights will certainly provoke the formulation of numerous challenges to theology and how it functions in the context of the theological turn. I will advance the thesis that the Christianity that comes after the end of Christianity—after its kenotic death—is a particular mode of thinking, namely, the task of thinking faith.

I thus intend first to examine the somewhat neglected perspective of considering the thought of Patočka as it relates to religion and theology and thereby to make something of an original contribution to Patočka studies. I will also, however, consider Patočka in relation to what has become known as the theological turn in contemporary continental philosophy and as a forerunner of this movement, with a particular contribution to recent developments in phenomenology. Second, the theological perspective of the book will go beyond a mere description and classification of the theological motifs in Patočka and develop a genuine theological reading that will contribute to the general scholarship on Jan Patočka, but it will also unfold unexpected possibilities for Christian thinking as such—what is traditionally called theology. In this sense, as I argue in the conclusion, such an engagement with Patočka will contribute to the discussion concerning the close but always complex relationship between theology and philosophy while at the same time opening up a refreshing approach to “thinking” and “living” transcendence.

The Contexts and Contours of Patočka’s Thought

Patočka studies are flourishing today. His phenomenological interpretations of and elaborations on the works of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and his thought-provoking analysis of the idea of Europe and the philosophy of history hold center stage in much recent scholarship. The burden of this present offering is to lay out a further perspective—a theological one. Is it a coincidence that Patočka’s very first published work and his final finished work both concern religion and theology? Although almost fifty years separate his short essay “Theology and Philosophy” (1929) and the more lengthy “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion” (1977), we discern a gradually developing interest in Christianity throughout Patočka’s philosophical activity.

Jan Patočka was born in 1907 in northern Bohemia, at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He studied philosophy in Prague and in Paris, where he met Edmund Husserl. This encounter was to set Patočka’s philosophical orientation and see him develop a genuine interest in phenomenology. In 1931, Patočka earned his doctorate in philosophy, defending a thesis on *The Notion of Evidence*,¹ and began his academic career as an assistant professor at Charles University in Prague. Thanks to a Humboldt scholarship, Patočka was able to study in Berlin and Freiburg

from 1932 to 1933. Although he arrived in Germany at the invitation of Husserl, the most decisive moment for Patočka's later philosophical development was his encounter with Martin Heidegger. Patočka concurs with Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world and the idea that the human subject is a historical being—a being that is radically different from the being of objects. After his time in Freiburg and after witnessing significant political changes in Germany, Patočka returned to Prague where he cofounded Cercle philosophique de Prague and became its first secretary. The movement emerged as a critical reaction to the (neo)positivist philosophical mainstream of the time and hosted Husserl's Prague lectures in 1935. The following year, Patočka finished his *Habilitationsschrift* on *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*.² A promising academic career was interrupted when Nazi Germany invaded Czechoslovakia in 1939 and closed the Czech universities. After the war, Patočka returned to Charles University but did not stay long. The communist coup of 1948 led to purges against all "classes," including the intelligentsia. As a humanist-democratic philosopher, Patočka was expelled from the university and worked at various minor research positions and later as a librarian at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. The Prague Spring, an attempt to democratize socialism in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s, enabled Patočka to renew his academic career. In 1968, he was named a full professor in Prague and three years later received an honorary doctorate from the University of Aachen. His third spell at the university lasted only four years, however. The Soviet occupation and fresh purges at all levels of society forced Patočka into retirement and he was expelled from academia for the final time. Despite this misfortune, Patočka remained active and participated in the underground activities of the intellectual opposition to the communist regime. What began on a small scale—one philosopher and his students meeting in private to discuss philosophy—developed into Patočka's very public involvement as a spokesperson for Charter 77, a human rights movement that protested oppression by the totalitarian state. Because of his very public acceptance and performance of this responsibility, Patočka died in dramatic circumstances in 1977.

Hypotheses concerning Patočka's continual intellectual struggle with religion, and the importance for theology of that struggle, might seem somewhat controversial considering the standard interpretation of his multilayered work. The usual approach to Patočka tends to focus on one or another of his principal areas of interest and his major writings from a particular period of his life. Patočka's early engagement with phenome-

nology between the wars is typically represented by *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (1936). Faced by a neopagan Nazi ideology that represented the tragic eruption of a particular manifestation of modernity that would be revealed in all its horror during the Second World War, Patočka set about the grandiose project of reinterpreting the origins of modernity and modern rationality. Patočka did not finish “his great book,” however, but left us with numerous drafts, published posthumously under the editorial title *Andere Wege in die Moderne* (Other ways to the modern age).³ After the war, Patočka gave himself to serious reflection on the demise of metaphysics and dedicated much of his time to developing alternative patterns of thought. The highlight of this period is the corpus of texts known as *Negative Platonism*.⁴ In the later years of his philosophical life, Patočka elaborates on two interrelated ideas. First, he develops his own general philosophy of history. Second, and more particularly, he reflects on the notion of Europe, its end, and what is to come. Two monographs sum up these philosophical endeavors: *Europe and Post-Europe* and *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*.⁵ His research led Patočka to reconsider some of his previous phenomenological positions and to republish *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* with a new postscript “*The Natural World Remeditated Thirty-Three Years Later*.” Here, Patočka presents his idea of human existence as a movement. In fact, he talks about three movements of existence: the movement of acceptance, the movement of defense, and the movement of truth, also described as the movement of transcendence. This interpretation of human being-in-the-world is generally taken as “Patočka’s most original contribution to philosophy.”⁶ The pressing political situation also motivated Patočka to explore the Platonic idea of caring for the soul and on this basis to formulate a spiritual response to the unpleasantness in society, something that is still relevant today.⁷

It is not possible to do justice to the complexity of Patočka’s thought in so short a volume. That his work is so multifocal and unsystematic has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that Patočka can be interpreted from many different angles. Phenomenological interpretations come first, of course,⁸ but Patočka is becoming an increasingly important figure in political philosophy in our contemporary post-European world,⁹ especially in relation to the discourse on the philosophy of history, the importance to Europe of the Greek legacy, and Christianity and the tradition of metaphysics. Finally, Patočka is understood as the interpreter of the crisis of modernity and, in this sense, also of the crisis of rationality. The chief drawback of the rather scattershot nature of Patočka’s work is that his

“big ideas” tempt the interpreter to focus, as we have already suggested, on a particular period or a particular set of writings. Those who take this approach can easily overlook the lines of thought that developed more gradually and that become apparent only when his oeuvre is considered as a whole, from the very earliest writings of his youth to the great works of philosophical maturity.

So, what is usually considered to represent the core of Patočka’s work? Erazim Kohák, biographer and translator of Patočka’s essential writings into English, summarizes the three most common ways of classifying the thought of the Czech phenomenologist: (1) philosophy without a kernel (*Philosoph ohne Mitte*), (2) the philosophy of humanism, and (3) existential phenomenology.¹⁰ The first approach claims that Patočka’s work lacks thematic coherence and skips from one topic to another according to the historical context. Dramatic historical changes and challenges certainly influenced Patočka’s philosophical focus. The geopolitical situation in postwar Europe stimulated numerous philosophical reflections on the idea of Europe, including Patočka’s own. It is possible, however, to trace Patočka’s interest in this problem to his very first engagement with Edmund Husserl and his *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*.¹¹ It can very easily be argued, therefore, that Patočka is being coherent in following the theme of Europe and the crisis of Europe throughout most of his professional life.

The second reading places Patočka as the successor of the humanistic philosophical tradition prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Czech philosophical context. Following Tomáš G. Masaryk, Patočka published numerous studies on social and political issues that were in line with the Enlightenment tradition of republicanism and democracy. His later engagement with the work of Jan Amos Comenius, whom Patočka interprets as a representative of an alternative modern humanistic tradition in contrast to, for example, Descartes, supports the view that Patočka was a modern humanist. His involvement in Charter 77 seems to confirm his lifelong humanistic orientation, which he inherited from Masaryk in the interwar period.

The humanistic line is interrupted by the Second World War, however, after which Patočka draws ever closer to Martin Heidegger. Some of his ideas even echo the dark language of Friedrich Nietzsche—the title of the sixth heretical essay reads, “Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War.” The fact is, however, that Patočka had engaged with Heidegger as early as the 1930s, so reading his work through the lens

of existential phenomenology—the third of Kohák’s trilogy of approaches to Patočka—has relatively long roots. It is quite clear, furthermore, that the postwar texts lean much more on Heidegger, and that the Husserlian line of thought fades into the background.

Paul Ricoeur offers an alternative classification and identifies two focal points in Patočka’s thought: (1) the phenomenology of the natural world and (2) the philosophy of history.¹² In this sense, Ricoeur follows more the Husserlian and Heideggerian line of thought in Patočka’s work. According to Ricoeur, Patočka never lost sight of phenomenology and developed phenomenological issues beyond his great German teachers. He notes that in his thesis on “the natural world,” Patočka expresses a certain dissatisfaction with Husserl’s conclusions, which are still “too modern” in holding on to the dualism of subject and object. Heidegger seems to offer a way beyond this impasse, but, as Patočka’s later phenomenological studies clearly show, the philosophy of *Dasein* is also inadequate. For Ricoeur, this is the moment Patočka introduces his teaching on the movements of existence and on being as a movement. Patočka’s phenomenology of movement does not refer to the typical meaning of moving from one place to another. What Patočka has in mind is better described as “emerging.” Movement informs beings, or in Patočka’s words movement is “that which makes being what it is.”¹³ The bottom line of Patočka’s argument is to overcome the polar division between objectivity and subjectivity, or as Ricoeur puts it: “Movement as an actualization on the way is not more subjective than objective. The being in motion is happening.”¹⁴

The second central facet of Patočka’s thought according to Ricoeur is the philosophy of history. The question of the meaning of history is present throughout Patočka’s oeuvre, but interestingly enough this line of questioning in Patočka does not seek an objective answer. For him, it is not possible to say that the meaning of history is this or that, in other words, “this” or “that” thing. Rather, the meaning of history is something that is constantly at stake in the drama of human freedom. Concretely, Patočka finds the meaning of history in realizing its problematcity, that is, in the “shaking” of presupposed meaning. The Czech word *otřes* that Patočka uses in this context is very strong. It carries the meaning of being moved or shocked not only emotionally but existentially; the German word *erschüttern* also expresses Patočka’s idea more faithfully than the English word *shake*. Because Patočka talks about “being shaken” in his widely read *Heretical Essays*, secondary literature often associates this term with those who experienced wars, totalitarian regimes, and other dramatic events

of recent history, but were able to resist despite having no real power.¹⁵ Ivan Chvatík nonetheless suggests a different context for the phrase. For Chvatík, Patočka is referring to the epochal shock caused by “the death of God and the collapse of metaphysics.”¹⁶ This brings us back to the intuition behind this book. In my hypothesis, Patočka’s thought has high theological relevance, especially at a time when Christianity is once more indisputably an issue in continental philosophy.

It is true that the so-called theological turn in French phenomenology appeared on the scene only after Patočka’s death—at least if we regard the publication of Jean-Luc Marion’s *Dieu sans l'être* (1982) as the symbolic breakthrough that initiated the debate.¹⁷ But this has not stopped some authors listing Patočka alongside Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Jean-Yves Lacoste as the forerunners, and even the authors, of the theological turn in continental philosophy.¹⁸

Patočka is one of the few thinkers who already in his time conceived the crisis of modernity not just in terms of its cultural and scientific dimensions, but explicitly analyzed the need for a reassessment of religion, and, in the European context, particularly of Christianity. From the very early writings until the late *Heretical Essays* there runs a core of untimely thoughts that are as provocative and heretical to the Christian tradition as they are to the triumphant secularism of modern times. This philosophical venture makes him stand out as an important forerunner of and critical counterweight to the contemporary resurgence of religion in scholarly and intellectual discourse.¹⁹

Although this point of view is rare and not widely accepted, the present volume adopts it as its point of departure. To justify an exploration of the potential theological implications of Patočka’s work, we will now briefly explore the assertion that Christianity is central to his work.

Patočka and Christianity

Patočka was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church but raised in a secular, anticlerical family. Like many of his fellow citizens, after the founding of the free Czechoslovak state in 1918, Patočka left the church in order to make a symbolic break with the Catholic Habsburg monarchy. Interestingly,

he returned to Catholicism a year later but did not become a practicing believer. A serious intellectual engagement with Christianity was mediated for Patočka through his Protestant friends and colleagues at university. Although Patočka was discouraged from converting to Protestantism by Protestant theologians themselves, the fascination of what he saw as the energizing Protestant thinking of the twentieth century very much stuck in his mind. Nonetheless, in later life, Patočka would rediscover the depths of Catholicism, mostly through literature.²⁰ Although it is difficult to say on the basis of biography alone whether Patočka was closer to Catholicism or Protestantism, whether he was a non-Christian or truly a Christian thinker,²¹ the present volume nonetheless puts forward the thesis that thinking concerning Christianity is an integral part of Patočka's phenomenological philosophy. In *Heretical Essays*, Patočka writes enigmatically about Christianity: "Christianity remains thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through human outreach that enabled humans to struggle against decadence."²² It would not be stretching the point to say that this book is all about that one sentence, which will launch us into a theological reading of Patočka's thought, into laying out the possible meanings of Christianity as something "great," "unsurpassed," but also "un-thought-through" in Patočka, and into focusing on the possibilities of rethinking theology against this background. In other words, the main object of this book serves a double purpose: to describe, systematically, the theological motifs in Patočka and to draw out the implications for theology of Patočka's thought.

First, however, it is necessary to consider what Patočka actually has to say about Christianity, and here the preceding English translation is somewhat misleading. The main problem is with the word "outreach," which Kohák uses for the Czech word *vzmach*. An alternative rendering could be "upswing," but this seems equally inadequate.²³ The French *élan* and the German *Aufschwung* in the respective translations of Patočka's work²⁴ do much better than either of the English variants.

Vzmach is not a word used in everyday conversation. It is a carefully thought through philosophical notion. In the context of the Christianity portrayed in *Heretical Essays*, it seems that for Patočka *vzmach* refers to a sense of transcendence.²⁵ This transcendence does not, however, point to an otherworldly reality but to the freedom of human being, which transcends the world as a world of things that appear to us. Followers of Heidegger would say that Patočka uses *vzmach* to point out the ontological difference between being human and the being of entities; *vzmach* is what

enables us to struggle against decadence, to cope with the forgetfulness of the fundamental difference between being human and other beings, but also to deal with forgetfulness concerning the position of being-in-the-world as historical beings. *Vzmach* is therefore a dynamic driving force, something that transcends limits and crosses boundaries. It seems much more plausible to use the French word *élan* in place of *outreach*, even in English editions, otherwise what Patočka has in mind when he uses the word *vzmach* is literally lost in translation.²⁶

There is another problem with our sentence. Kohák's translation reads "Christianity remains the greatest . . . human outreach," or, in our proposed version, "human élan." The Czech original, however, says only that "Christianity is thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through élan . . ." ²⁷ The word "human" is missing. Although Kohák suggests that Christianity remains a "human" driving force against decadence, Patočka in fact leaves his statement regarding the status of Christianity with a degree of ambiguity. "Christianity is . . . the élan that enabled humans to struggle against decadence," says Patočka. Now that we have exposed these subtle differences, we can turn our attention to the most interesting question concerning Patočka's enigmatic sentence, a question we will scrutinize very closely: What is Patočka's Christianity all about?

The provocative suggestion of the un-thought-through-ness of Christianity and its unfinishedness has led interpreters to various speculations. What might a fully thought-through Christianity look like? Is it a demythologized Christianity? Is it a secular Christianity without religion? Is it an immanent Christianity without transcendence? What does the "un-thought" of Christianity ultimately mean?

Patočka's relationship to Christianity is both complex and wide ranging. What we find wrapped up in a single sentence in *Heretical Essays* is present, and develops gradually, throughout Patočka's oeuvre. Theological issues seem to be a neglected axis of his philosophical work, but one possible approach to researching the topic is to apply a historical—chronological—perspective. Jindřich Veselý follows this path in his essay "Jan Patočka and Christianity," where he outlines four distinct periods over which Patočka developed his interest in Christian matters.²⁸

The first stage, between the wars, represents Patočka's philosophical beginnings as a phenomenologist and disciple of Husserl, a time when he clearly saw his role as an apologist for philosophy. Indeed, Patočka dedicates numerous studies to methodological questions in which he explores the field of philosophy, the vocation of the philosopher, and

the context of philosophical reasoning. Patočka's passion for the cause is extraordinary and it is no surprise that whenever philosophy encounters theology, Patočka resolutely defends his discipline and seeks to protect it from any potential "theological imperialism."

The perspective shifts in the years immediately following the Second World War. Although Patočka was largely prevented from publishing during this period, it was a significant one in his intellectual development. Having come face to face with the neopagan totalitarian ideology of National Socialism, Patočka does not hesitate to defend Christianity as being among the most prominent intellectual forces in European thought and Western civilization. Having seen Europe under serious threat, Patočka makes an intensive study of the history of philosophy, which brings him to the question of a post-European—or equally a post-Christian—epoch. From this moment forward, the pressing issue of Christianity after (the end of) Christianity remains uppermost in Patočka's mind.

Following the philosophical mainstream of the 1950s, Patočka then, in Veselý's third phase, explores the possibilities of philosophy after the alleged end of metaphysics. He develops the idea of negative Platonism and sketches out a larger work under the same title, which in many respects resembles later attempts to overcome ontotheology in the context of the theological turn. Veselý reminds us that Patočka explicitly acknowledges that philosophy and theology share a concern with metaphysics and its critique.²⁹ Here, Patočka's elaboration on the notion of faith prefigures the position concerning Christianity that he developed in the later years of his philosophical career.

In Patočka's opinion, faith is a particular mode of thinking and of living in openness to the future.³⁰ His output in the 1960s and 1970s—the final phase in Veselý's scheme—offers several variations on this main idea. Although the vast secondary literature on the final period of Patočka's output focuses on themes such as caring for the soul and the movements of existence, here we will consider the neglected but highly significant questions concerning the un-thought of Christianity, Christianity as the religion of responsibility, and the scandalous idea of kenotic sacrifice.

Veselý's chronological perspective on Patočka and Christianity reveals two things. First, that over the years, Patočka moves from polemicizing against Christianity to engaging with an interpretation of its possibilities in the context referred to as post-Christian. Second, and perhaps more important, Patočka shifts from acknowledging Christianity as a significant force in Europe to thinking about the importance of Christianity

after (the end of) Christianity, and about Christianity as thinking. We are again reminded, therefore, about the key idea that faith is something to be thought about, that faith is thinking. This leads us to a thesis that takes Patočka's thoughts on Christianity as being present throughout his life's work. Patočka's constantly growing interest in Christian and even theological issues points to a carefully thought-through goal of thinking beyond the limits of Christianity. If we read Patočka's works from all stages of his professional life from this perspective, we find that his reflections on Christianity after (the end of) Christianity, and thus his reflections on the possibility of transcendence from the point of view of being-in-the-world, is a golden thread—although often a slender one—in his lifelong philosophical inquiry. The preconditions for such an inquiry can already be detected in his early writings:

Part of the finitude of our actual life is to experience a need for some external support, for salvation. Salvation is the sustenance of our life by an external, absolute power. . . . It is not possible to rely on the gods, because the absolute is not outside but within us. Man stands in a closer and more intimate relation to God than is either safe or pleasant.³¹

Is this theology, or the philosophy of religion? Probably neither. Patočka is a phenomenologist, so in line with his philosophical upbringing he "perceives" Christianity, meaning he sees Christianity as the possibility of thinking about God/transcendence within us. Interestingly, Patočka generally uses negative—apophatic—language to describe the experience of transcendence as he is keen to resist proposing positive definitions. For Patočka, therefore, faith represents more than knowledge and convictions or adherence to a set of opinions and confessions.³² Faith, as noted earlier, is thinking, that is, thinking and questioning about the truth of life and life in truth. The field of thinking seems to be the common ground where philosophy and theology meet. The aim I pursue in this book, therefore, is not primarily to present Patočka as a thinker with a strong affiliation to theology but to develop a Christian thinking that draws inspiration from Patočka, and thus to contribute to what Jean-Yves Lacoste has recently described as the shift from theology to theological thinking.³³ Without employing theological imperialism, thinking faith after Christianity seems in Patočka to be one embodiment of *philosophia vera*—which is not the same as Christian philosophy—but not the only one. In summary, this

challenge to adopt the task of theological thinking offers the opportunity to challenge theology to open itself to a neglected form of phenomenological philosophy and at the same time to have an impact on theology from within. Interacting with Patočka leads us away from the safe haven of theology and to becoming sensitive to the task of (theological) thinking.

Toward an Appropriation of Patočka's Philosophy in Theology

Because Patočka presents Christianity as something that is the “greatest,” which is “unsurpassed,” but which is also “un-thought,” this way of presenting the issue directly concerns theological thinking. Recent theological scholarship has inquired into philosophical interpretations of religious issues and Christian topics proposed by the authors of the theological turn with the intention of drawing inspiration for our understanding of faith in the contemporary—postmodern—context.

The number of works on Patočka's thoughts on Christianity is constantly growing, both among individual philosophers—Ludger Hagedorn, Eddo Evink, and Nicolas de Warren³⁴—and in collective works. A special issue of the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* (no. 15, 2015) is almost entirely dedicated to reflections on Patočka's work on “religion and the gift.”

Despite the fact that philosophers—albeit a limited number—acknowledge Patočka's challenging interpretations of Christianity as a significant component of his overall work, it is striking that theologians are yet to give serious consideration to Patočka's thought. Why should this be? First, there is the issue of language and the availability of sources: analysis of Patočka's original works requires knowledge of his mother tongue, Czech, which is certainly not the easiest language to master. But this cannot be the whole case. Excellent translations of Patočka exist in French and German, and the English corpus of texts is constantly growing. It is certainly possible to initiate a theological discussion with Patočka on the basis of sources available in the principal world languages. Second, and perhaps more important, Patočka's work has not been met with unbounding enthusiasm by Czech theologians. There is a general lack of dialogue between theology and phenomenology in the Czech theological world³⁵ and somewhat of a negative attitude in Patočka's philosophical disciples toward any attempt to seek out his theological relevance.³⁶ The aim of the present work is to

remedy this lack in the philosophical and theological fields and to offer a novel and integral interpretation of Patočka's phenomenological philosophy. Thus, my taking—or perhaps dragging—Patočka into the theater of theological debate is intended as a humble contribution to theology's traditional adagio of *fides quaerens intellectum*—faith seeking understanding.³⁷ We will soon see that Patočka himself values this theological statement and contrasts it with another part of theological tradition, that is, *philosophia ancilla theologiae* (chapter 1).

For Patočka, Christianity is a matter of thinking. Yet as many of his reflections show—for example, his ideas about Europe after Europe, and the task of philosophy after the end of metaphysics—Patočka likes to think “beyond” the presupposed meaning of things. His call for thinking consists in pointing beyond itself and therefore contains a certain sense of transcendence. I therefore propose a reading of Patočka that makes possible a novel understanding of Christianity after (the end of) Christianity. On one level, we can interpret our situation as the completion of the shift from Christendom to a post-Christian age. Religion has ceased to be the principal reference point for interpreting our existence in the world. Modernity removed the sacred canopy, and this allowed for rapid development in many fields, especially science and technology. However, the emergence of enlightened humanity also has its dark side. For Patočka, the crisis of modernity can be deemed a spiritual crisis (chapter 2). And as every crisis is also an opportunity, instead of uselessly lamenting the loss of Christian privileges, Patočka's critical account of modern rationality leads us to think of the Christianity that is to come—“after Christendom.”

On another level, reflecting on Christianity after Christianity can also mean heeding the call to a thinking that is never complete but always emerging. Patočka's deconstruction of metaphysics in order to give way to metaphysical thinking (chapter 3) motivates us to think of the deconstruction of the timeless religion of reason. In this sense, Christianity after Christianity is a reference to thinking faith beyond ontotheology and the *religio* of myth (chapters 4 and 5).

This search for Christianity after Christianity, and thus for a theological appropriation of Patočka's thought, is based on an investigation of the entire corpus of Patočka's writings, including some lesser-known texts that remained unpublished during the philosopher's lifetime or that remained only as the drafts of great and ambitious but unfinished projects. The inquiry reveals the proximity of Patočka's thought to the current debate on the theological turn. I intend to prove this hypothesis

using three interrelated themes: (1) the deconstruction of Christianity in Patočka, (2) Derrida's reading of Patočka as a Christian thinker, and (3) Patočka's eminent interest in the motif of kenotic sacrifice. This focus on the un-thought of Christianity in Patočka's deconstructions does not necessarily lead to a purely negative theology—as many postmodern engagements with Christianity seem to do.³⁸ Rather, it unfolds a positive conception of Christianity as the amplitude of life (chapter 5). In this sense, Christianity after Christianity appears to represent the call to responsibility (chapter 6) manifested in the figure of kenotic sacrifice (chapter 7).

Any thesis that supports Patočka's relevance for theology risks accusations of heresy. A theological engagement with Patočka will surely be condemned by defenders of pure phenomenological orthodoxy—just as the French phenomenologists Marion, Henry, and Chrétien were criticized by Dominique Janicaud for their interest in religion.³⁹ As much as it challenges mainstream conceptions of Christianity as a metaphysical *vera religio veri Dei*, the proposition of thinking faith after Christianity could certainly be called heretical. Nonetheless, drawing on Patočka's own method of heretical thinking, that is, his "shaking" and interrupting of the supposed nonproblematic meanings, and following Patočka's creative use of his sources and his pushing their interpretation to their limits, I aim to question and challenge both the standard interpretation of Patočka as a philosopher who has little to say about theology, and the theology that shows little interest in the contemporary contextual sensibilities that have been well captured in the critical consciousness of recent philosophy.