



CENTRE FOR MISSIONARY LEADERSHIP

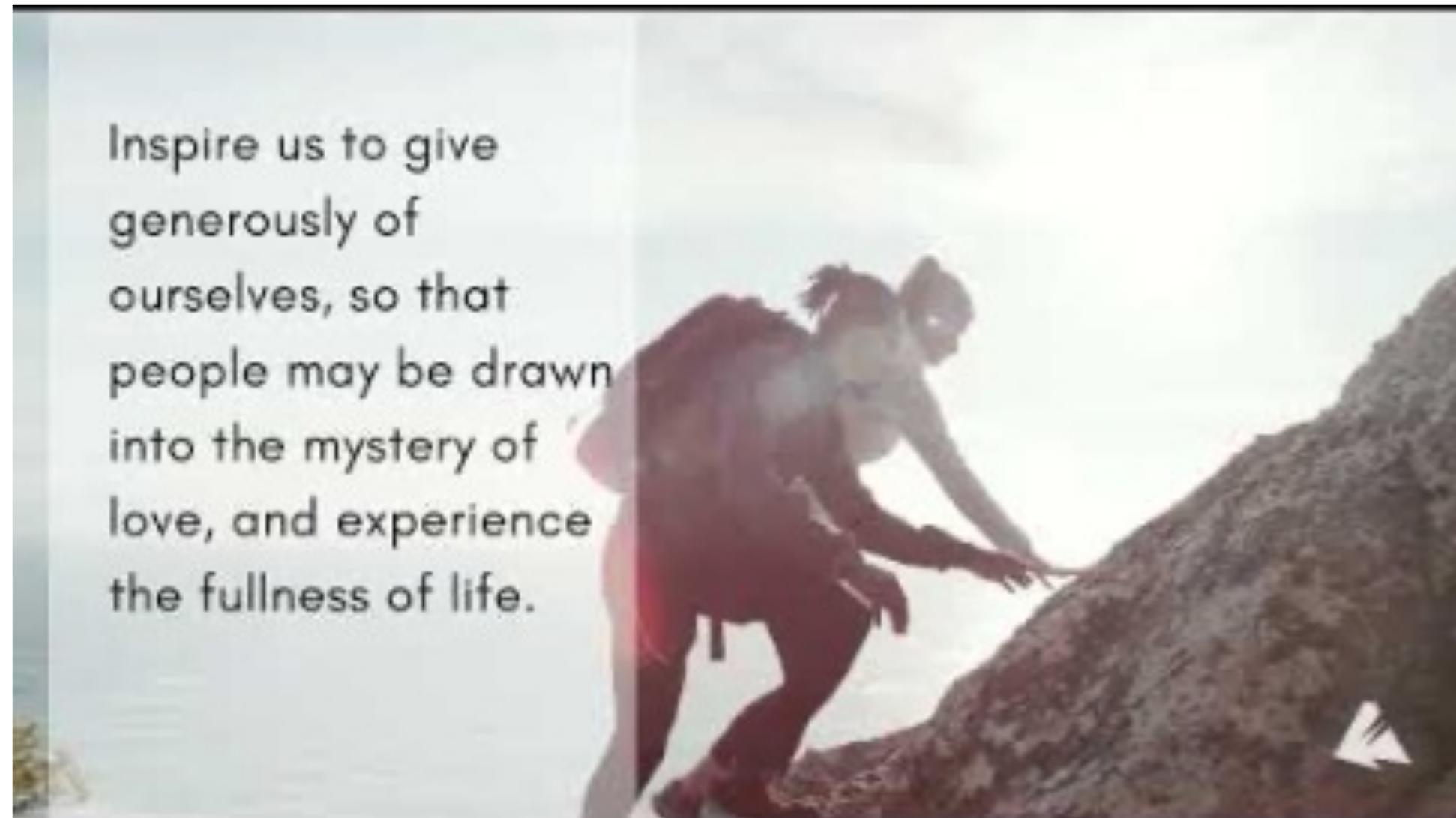
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A work of the Missionaries of God's Love

# The Sociocultural Context for Mission in Aust/NZ

Theological Foundations 5

Inspire us to give  
generously of  
ourselves, so that  
people may be drawn  
into the mystery of  
love, and experience  
the fullness of life.

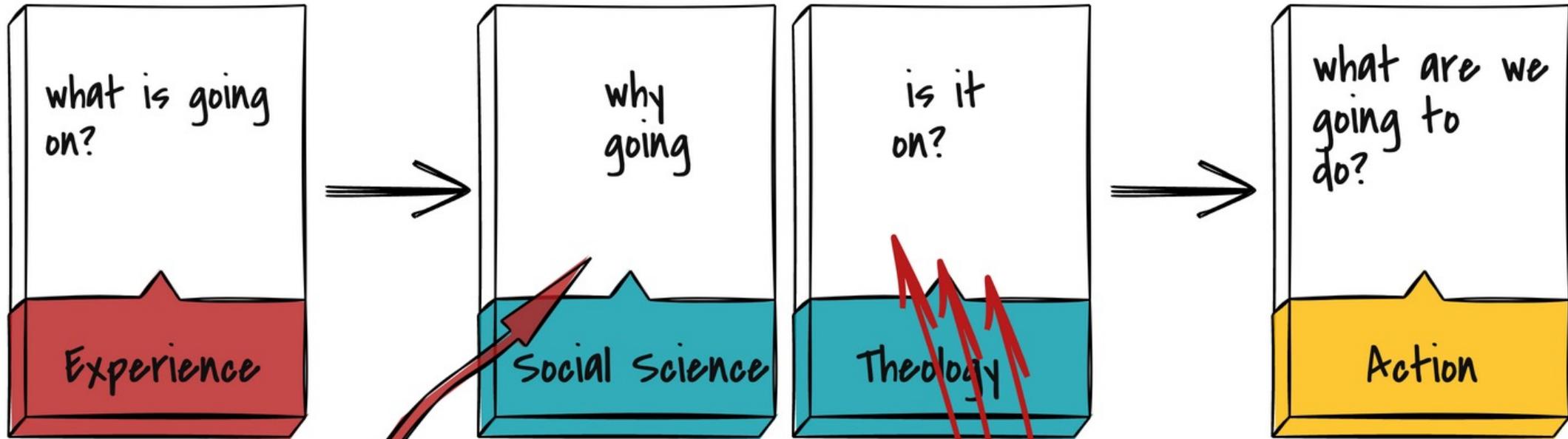


# Introduction

- Where have we come from:
  - 1 Scriptural Foundations of Mission
  - 2 Mission in the Early Church
  - 3 Introduction to a Contemporary Theology of Mission
  - 4 The Process of Evangelisation – The RCIA
- Tonight: We are going to look at the sociocultural context in which we evangelise – in Aust/NZ, but actually the western world
- Why? Cannot speak to people today if we do not understand them and their world



# Why look at the sociocultural context?



Understanding the sociocultural context

Theology of mission



# What does “sociocultural” mean?

- Stephen Long: “Cultural is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language”
- “Culture” is a metaphor – comes from the word cultivate – to grow
- It gets its meaning from context it is used in: e.g. 2 major senses in Arete – this course as referring to dynamics of Aust./NZ society; next semester as the operating dynamics of an organization (e.g. Google, football club, or a parish).
- So culture is a dynamic of relationships – the way we relate – to each other and our world
- We tend to think of culture as something that just ‘is’, but it has actually been constructed. *Cultures are made ...*



# What is culture?

- Thin description - bare minimum to be said
- Thick description - cannot find a universal law to describe culture. Cultures are best understood by standing within them and explaining their richness.



# Some Theses about Culture (drawing upon *Clashing Symbols* by Michael Paul Gallagher)

1. Culture is a uniquely human creation, as a way of adapting to the world. Animals don't have cultures. Culture is a way freedom and transcendence are embodied
2. Culture is inherited from the past but it also changes and adapts in the present
3. Culture evolves into a selective set of assumptions that are unconsciously assimilated within a group or society; cultural beliefs, traits, and assumptions are passed on via "osmosis" – implicitly, without explicit instruction



# Theses continued ...

4. Culture involves an entire way of life for a people; it is a source of solidarity and identity
5. Culture involves a convergence of both visible and hidden ways of interpreting the world
6. Culture carries and expresses meanings and beliefs (visions of “life”); values (norms for behaviour); customs, practices and traditions
7. Cultures are expressed in institutions, systems, and symbolic forms
8. Cultures range from everyday activities to larger or higher levels of existence, but these also often converge – e.g. eating and belonging



# Theses continued ...

9. Of its nature culture is self-communicating: it passes on things to people. But in times of cultural instability this becomes harder to do.

10. Cultures are fallible constructs – they require discernment, questioning, and renewal

11. Cultures have been grounded in a religious consciousness or sense throughout human history. The present split in the western world between culture and “religion” is novel.



# 3 Principles to Guide Theological Reflection Concerning Culture

1. Culture is about meaning-making and so oriented towards the transcendent
2. Culture is a human construct, and so it is ambiguous – filled with light and shade, and so needs discernment and purification
3. Culture mediates faith for people

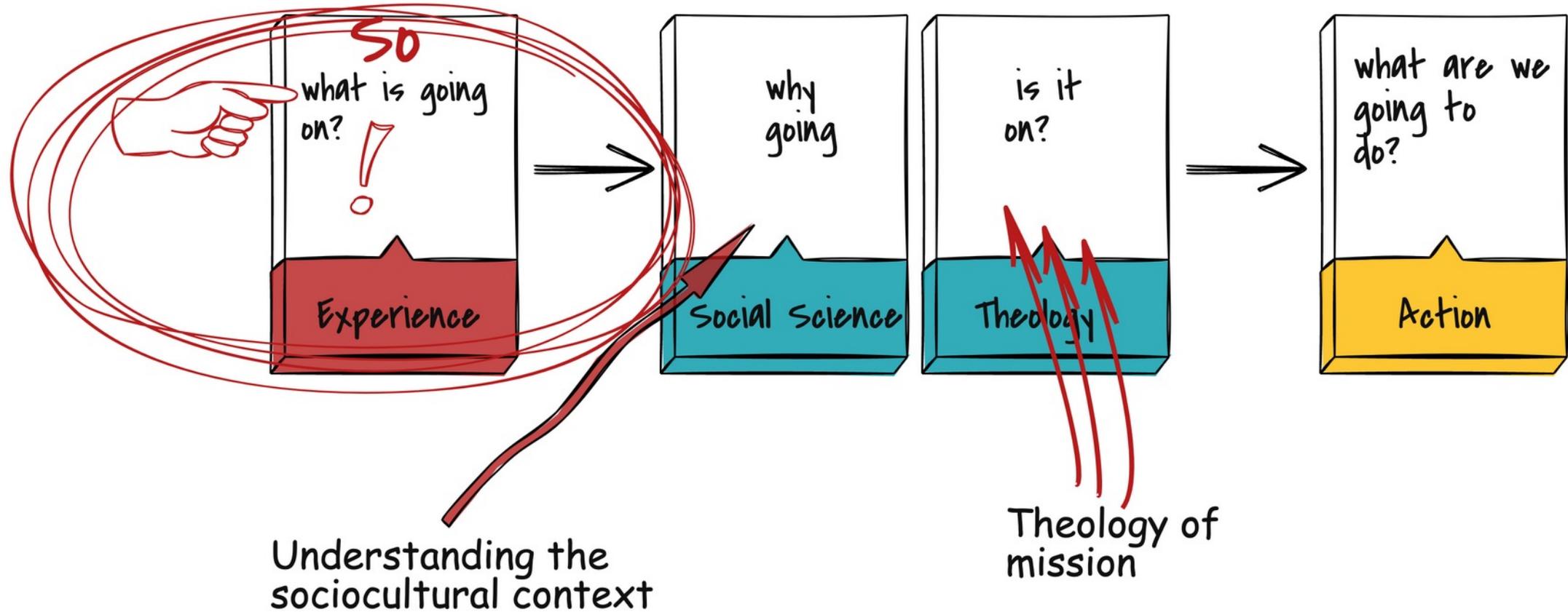


# Possible Christian Responses to Culture (drawing upon H. Richard Niebuhr)

1. Opposition to the culture
2. Innocent acceptance of the Culture
3. Discernment of both good and evil within the culture – transformation of sinful elements, affirmation of God-given elements.



# What are some of the principal features of our Culture?



# The Decline of Belief and Practice

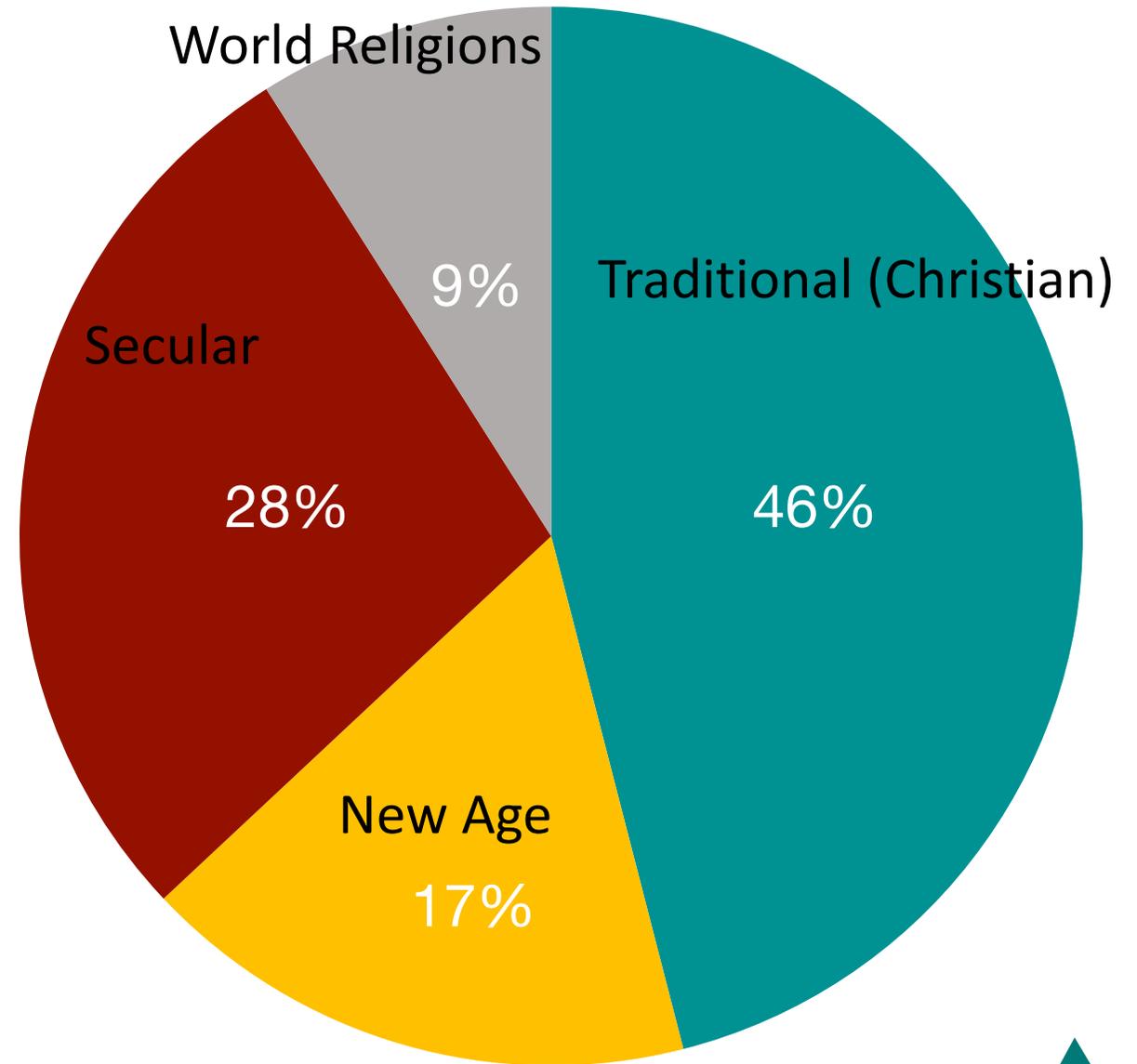
*The Spirit of Generation Y: Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia*

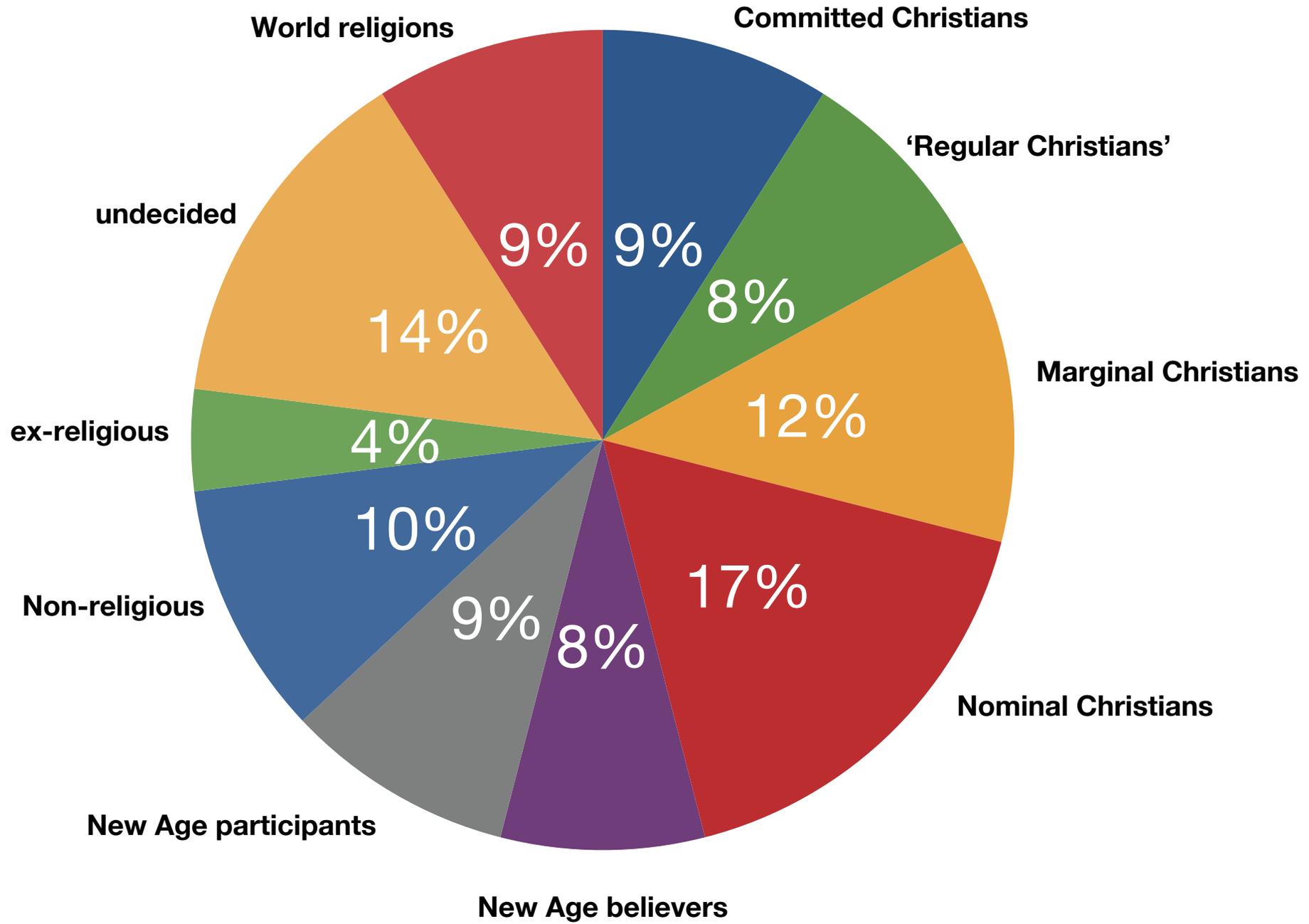
Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton, Ruth Weber

2007

Monash Uni/ACU study

Largest Australian Study of Young People's attitudes to faith and spirituality





# Why has this Decline Happened?

- Sunday is no longer sacred – other things competing with Church
- Technology
- Materialism



# Church figures often blame this on “secularism”

Pope Paul VI:

“a concept of the world according to which the latter is self-explanatory, without any necessary recourse to God, who thus becomes superfluous and an encumbrance”

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 55



John Paul II

“the eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a practical materialism, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism”

*Evangelium Vitae 23*



Pope Francis

“We are not living in an era of change but a change of era”

Address to the Italian bishops



# Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*

By talking about secularisation and secularism, have we really got to the bottom of our secular age?

Secularisation: The process of change by which a society's institutions are given autonomy from religious meaning, understandings or authority: this is often explained as the relegation to the private sphere

Secularism: The decline of belief and practice

Secularity: The conditions of belief



# The Age we are in

William Auden: The Age of Anxiety

Charles Taylor: The Age of Authenticity

William Friedman: The Age of Accelerations



# Historical Ages

- The Ancien Regime
- The Age of Mobilisation
- The Age of Authenticity





# The Age of Authenticity

- Expressive individualism – begins with Romantic Movement (art): to express your innermost self through your art
- In the 1950s and 1960s this became a “mass phenomenon” – we all now need to express our true selves
- The cultural revolution we have experienced has been animated by the ideal that every person must become their true self.
- Or to put it another way, we all have our own way of being human, which we must each discover in order to be our true selves.
- As Taylor puts it: “one’s own originality is “something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it I am also defining myself”





# In the Age of Authenticity Identity is Everything

- Identity looks like something I discover or even create – it is unique to me
- In reality though identity is achieved in relationship



# Spirituality in the Age of Authenticity

- “the religious life or practice I become part of ... must speak to me, it must make sense to me in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this”. Charles Taylor
- This means that spirituality in the AA takes the form of a “quest”
- When expressive individualism works itself out on the spiritual plane it creates a nova effect – many people don’t define themselves as atheists or believers, but as residing on a very particular personal point or location “spiritually”
- The quest can take people from being “religious” to being “secular”, but it can also lead some to the Church – if something from Catholic tradition or spirituality speaks to them



# E.g. 1 from the Spirituality of Gen Y Study

Do you believe in God?

“right now, probably not. I’m at that stage because I went to a religious primary school and that was sort of ‘God this and God that’.

And now that I’m getting sort of different ideas from everyone, having everyone’s life experiences and things, what they believe in thrown at me, so now I’m finding out what I believe in too ...

I am actually baptised Lutheran, because I’ve been baptised and been confirmed and done all the steps at church. But that’s in my family, religion, like you are born into that ... when you are sort of old enough to actually start saying ‘hang on, what about this, what about that, I don’t believe this or that’. So I’m sort of finding my way.”



## E.g. 2 From the Spirituality of Gen Y Study

[looking at a photo of a stained glass window]

“It’s funny actually, that one, I’m not religious in any way at all, I’m really atheistic but I don’t know, just how it is beautiful. I don't understand it, I mean that kind of thing like trying to figure out why I’m not religious or what I do believe in is a big part of my life because I have got so many people telling me that they are not religious or they believe this and they believe that. So much of the international stuff, it’s conflict over religion, and I just don’t understand how people can believe certain things”.



# Seekers and Dwellers

- Seekers: People who have embarked upon the quest
- Dwellers: People who believe that a religious authority external to them (God, the bible, the Church) guides their lives
- “Believing still” vs “Believing again”

