

Post-Christian but also Post-Secular

Europe is moving towards a new fascination with spirituality but is still deeply suspicious of religion, authority, and, to some extent, texts. How can we plant gospel communities that can navigate this unusual landscape?

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1. Mission in the west

- a. The shift of culture means that the west is now a mission field
- b. Mission is no longer from the west to the rest but from everywhere to everywhere
- c. But it is a unique mission field – unlike any other we have known

2. Europe is described as a culture of “post”

- a. Post Christendom
- b. Post Christian
- c. Post Modern
- d. Post Secular
- e. God is back but not necessarily in a way that helps Christian mission
- f. The rest of the world (often the Christian world) is coming to the west but that produces its own challenges

3. Spiritual but not religious

- a. Why the tension between these two ideas?
- b. Something transformative took place in the 1960's

- c. The Death of Christian Britain – Callum Brown
- d. The religious crisis of the 1960's
 - i. “The 1960’s were a period of decisive change in the religious history of the Western world – including not only Western Europe, but the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand...in the 1950’s the great majority of the people in all Western countries were at least nominal members of one of the Christian churches...In the ‘long 1960’s’ all of this was changing. Nearly every Western country saw a drop in church-going, and in some cases the drop was dramatic.” Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960’s*, OUP, 2007.

4. A cultural shift

- a. All institutions being questioned
- b. Modernity, science and reason also under suspicion
- c. Other world views and religions being explored
- d. Consumers not producers
- e. The stories we live by – Michel de Certeau

5. The search for a new story: 1987 — 2000

a. A patterning of events	29%	55%
b. Awareness of the presence of God	27%	38%
c. Awareness of prayer being answered	25%	37%
d. Awareness of sacred presence in nature	16%	29%
e. Awareness of the presence of the dead	18%	25%
f. Awareness of an evil presence	12%	25%
g. Cumulative Total	48%	76%

6. Research from Coventry Cathedral

- a. The ability to ask questions / to experience awe and wonder

- b. Concerns about destiny
- c. Interest in purpose and meaning
- d. Questioning about origins
- e. An awareness of a bigger power
- f. A sense of concern that all is not right with the world / questions about suffering

7. Is spirituality better than religion?

- a. The impact of the consumer story
- b. The challenge of ethics
- c. The search for a language to speak about God

8. The challenge for the church

- a. Reason is not enough
- b. The spiritual treasures of the past
- c. Developing spiritual practices
- d. The experience of God alongside the knowledge of God

9. A time of opportunity

- a. We are living between ages
- b. The consumer narrative is weaker than it seems:
 - i. “For the first time in human history, a shared mythos has broken down, and commercial messages are now taking the place of shared sacred stories. We know in our hearts that a profession designed to sell products cannot fill this gap. If we take the time to think of how many people are finding the only meaning they have in their lives from consumption of various sorts, we do not feel proud; we feel sad, or even outraged.” Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, McGraw-Hill, 2001, p. 359
- c. Unanswered longing

Useful resources:

The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation 1800-2000, Callum Brown, Routledge, 2001.

Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, Anthony Giddens, Polity, 1991.

Salt, Light and a City: Introducing Missional Ecclesiology, Graham Hill, Wipf and Stock, 2012.

Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church, Dwight Smith and Martin Robinson, Monarch, 2004.