

Religion in Adolescent Culture: A Calling to the Church

What do European teenagers think about religion? How important is it? What do they think about God? How do they practice their faith? Sociologist Erving Goffman talked about “frontstage” and “backstage” culture. In most of Europe the religious life of teenagers is not “frontstage.” It is “backstage” in a private room and is becoming increasingly individualistic and pluralistic. Fewer young people are visiting our churches and youth groups or following their parent’s religion, but they are still thinking about God and religion and drawing their own conclusions. The good news is that they are less skeptical towards Christianity than a few decades ago and a little more curious than before. The bad news is that most of them will never be introduced to the Christian faith. When it comes to religion, many are left alone. Looking at research from Norway and beyond, we will consider the calling to the church to be concerned with the youth outside our churches and discuss practical principles for mission-focused youth ministry.

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- I. A prayer in the city of hopelessness

- II. Old news: The secularization of Europe – from Jerusalem to digital Babylon

- III. New news: Research
 - A. Case study: Teens in the world’s 4th least religious country
 - 1. Religion is not important for today’s youth - or is it...?

 - 2. How do they practice their faith – or do they...?

The arenas of religion	“Backstage”	“Frontstage”
Community	Private organized religious practices	Public organized religious practices
Individual	Private individual religious practices	Public individual religious practices

3. What do they think of God and religion?
 - a. Which word will they use to describe God: Love 59%, Holy 54%, Power 48%, Almighty 48%, Close 46%, Creator 44%, Higher being 38%, Saviour 36%, Judge 34%, Energy 29%, Friend 22%, Personal 20%, Father 10%, Far away 9%, Angry 9%
 - b. What do they think of the truth of religions?
 - a. Only one religion can be true 23%
 - b. Many religions can be true 35%
 - c. No religions are true 19%
 - d. I don't know 23%
 - c. Is it OK to combine religions?
 - a. Yes 47%
 - b. No 29%
 - c. Don't know 24%
4. Some shocking news... if you could keep a secret...

B. International trends

1. Religious self-identity and religious activities among European youths
 - a. Self-identify as Christians (16-29 years old)

1 Poland 83%	8 Switzerland 44%	15 Belgium 25%
2 Lithuania 75%	9 Russia 41%	16 France 25%
3 Ireland 59%	10 Spain 40%	17 UK 22%
4 Slovenia 59%	11 Finland 37%	18 Netherl. 19%
5 Portugal 57%	12 Norway 36%	19 Estonia 19%
6 Austria 52%	13 Denmark 34%	20 Sweden 18%
7 Germany 47%	14 Hungary 33%	21 Czech rep. 9%

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- b. Church attendance
 - c. Prayer
 - 2. Is Europe secularized – or is there a better word to describe this age?
- IV. The best news – for today, yesterday, and tomorrow
- V. Spread the news: So what do we do (example)?
 - A. Missional youth ministry – some lessons from the north
 - B. Before we start: Support and fellowship.
 - C. Make contacts – the experience way: How to make contacts when the kids don't come to church?
 - D. Make disciples – the science way: How to lead young people to a faith that lasts in digital Babylon?
 - 1. Be their friend (intergenerational relations) – Am I loved?
 - 2. Let them experience Jesus for themselves (spiritual relations) – Who am I?
 - 3. Let them see the difference (mission) – What matters?
 - 4. Give them responsibility (leadership) – What's my purpose?
 - 5. Teach them how to apply their faith to the culture (practical education) – How should I live?
- VI. A prayer in the city of hopelessness – 20 years later
- VII. What if someone is waiting for us...