

Session Three—Contemporary Spirituality

Having looked at our contemporary fragmented rootless world in the first two sessions we now turn our attention to the spiritual life of Western culture. Attendance at church on Sundays has been declining for years. People are less and less ‘religious’. But that does not mean that there has been a decline in belief—quite the contrary. As we will see, the majority of people today have serious spiritual concerns, though few of them feel that the church can offer anything meaningful.

In this session we will be looking at some of the recent research into the spirituality of people who have little or no contact with the church. We will then briefly explore alternative spiritualities, including ‘new age’ and ‘dance/rave’ cultures.

The evidence suggests that, despite the expectations of many humanists and atheists, spiritual awareness is actually growing quite fast in the West. For instance, research undertaken by David Hay of Nottingham University asked random samples of people in 1987 and in 2000 the same questions about their spiritual experiences and their awareness. These were the numbers of people who responded positively:

Question—Have you ever had an awareness of:	1987	2000
A patterning of events	29%	55%
The presence of God	27%	38%
Prayer being answered	25%	37%
A sacred presence in nature	16%	29%
The presence of the dead	18%	25%
An evil presence	12%	25%
Cumulative total of positive responses (some had more than one positive)	48%	76%

David Hay does not believe that there has been a real increase in the frequency of spiritual experience but rather that people are now more willing to talk about it even with strangers (both the 1987 and 2000 polls were conducted over the telephone). But what do these people mean by spirituality? In order to try to find out more we look at the results of a number of different pieces of research focusing on contemporary expressions of spirituality.

Understanding the spirituality of people who don’t go to church

David Hay and Kate Hunt of the Adults’ Spirituality project at the University of Nottingham invited people chosen at random in a suburb of Nottingham to fill in a questionnaire. From this they identified 31 people who had no religious affiliation and who described themselves as ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’. These were then encouraged to talk in four focus groups led by the researchers. Each group was both video and audio recorded. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 60, with seventeen women and fourteen men taking part. Seventeen people identified themselves as ‘spiritual’ and fourteen as ‘religious’. Twenty-nine of the participants also agreed to take part in further one-to-one interviews with the researchers.

Some of their key findings:

- *Timidity*—perhaps the most significant finding was that nearly everyone they spoke to was very reluctant to talk about religion or spirituality. This seemed to go with a fear of being ‘preached at’ or evangelised. The reticence was greater when in a group; there appears to be strong peer pressure which keeps this a taboo subject.
- *Spirituality*—while some of the older people were not offended by the notion of religion, most associated it with dogma, rigidity and arrogance. Spirituality was not always a familiar concept but when it was explained it seemed to fit most people’s experiences and self-perception.
- *Questing*—for most of the participants, spirituality could be described as a kind of questing or seeking, often on a road which seems shrouded in mist.
- *God*—people often used bits of the Christian metanarrative when they wanted words or concepts to describe their experiences. But the word ‘God’, for instance, was not used to describe the Trinitarian God of orthodox belief. Similarly, references to Jesus came only from people who had had some childhood exposure to Christianity but even they were uncertain about who or what he was.
- *‘Something There’*—the most common response was to speak of ‘something there’, often something very important, but a refusal to name it or to speculate too much about it. In part this is due to ignorance and the effect of sustained cultural criticism of the notion of God in a secular scientific age. But Hay and Hunt also suggest that this might be seen as part of the *apophatic* tradition—refusing to utter the name of YHWH or accepting that we see through a glass darkly. The view was most starkly illustrated by ‘James’ who spoke of the ‘something’ he encountered as “deeper than God” and of his communion with it as “more profound than prayer”. We will encounter this approach and the implications of it again in session four, which is on speaking of God in contemporary culture.
- *Self-constructed Theologies*—Hay and Hunt found that the people to whom they spoke had no coherent view of God or theories about the nature and purpose of the universe. Instead they used a ‘pick and mix’ approach, often using fragments from Christianity mixed in with some New Age ideas, bits of Buddhism (such as ideas of karma and reincarnation) and so on. This *bricolage* (a term coined by the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss) is a common intellectual approach today, following the breakdown of confidence in the great metanarratives of religion and, increasingly, science.
- *Theodicy*—Theodicy—literally meaning the justice of God—is a term coined by the German philosopher and polymath Gottfried Leibnitz in 1710. He tried to show that despite the existence of evil in the world it is still possible and necessary to believe in a benevolent God. Despite Leibnitz’s best endeavours, this sample of 20th century people still see the problem of suffering and natural disasters as a serious stumbling block to belief.

As a result of this study a question was inserted into the *Soul of Britain* survey (2000): “Some people don’t think there is a God. Why do you think this is?” The answers were:

- *There is too much suffering, poverty and injustice for God to exist (41%)*
- *Lack of knowledge/teaching about God (31%)*
- *Science has explained the mysteries of life (22%)*
- *The concept of God is irrelevant to modern society (20%)*
- *Other (6%)*

- *Don't know (5%)*

In their study, Hay and Hunt also asked about the Church and Churchgoers. The responses were depressingly predictable but not quite as straightforward as the stereotypes might suggest:

- *Cynicism about the religious institution*—When in groups there were plenty of references to the church being hypocritical, bigoted, out of touch, and so on. In the one-to-one interviews a more subtle picture emerged, indicating the strength of social pressures to adopt a cynical critical attitude towards church. In private, the criticisms tended to be less severe. The criticisms which did emerge seemed to be around a perceived obsession with control, a desire to live in the past, and a failure to be concerned with humanity as a whole.
- *The Bible*—Even those who had been brought up with some religious background never mentioned reading the Bible. At best it seemed that the Bible was full of stories. At worst it was impossible to understand, bracketed with Shakespeare as part of our heritage but irrelevant to everyday life.
- *Church buildings*—although none of the people surveyed went to church when there were services in progress, quite a few would go when the building was empty. They would speak of their experiences by using words such as calmness, humbleness, tranquillity and beauty. Some couldn't find any words to describe how they felt when they went into a church—Rudolph Otto's *numinous*, perhaps—and there were a few who found the architecture off-putting: too austere, too gloomy, too big.
- *Inauthenticity*—the word 'hypocrisy' was commonly used to describe church folk, especially those who represent it in public. Christians can be seen as cloyingly nice in the context of church and behaving disgracefully when outside it.
- *Lack of openness to the outsider*—church is perceived as 'difficult' for beginners and closed to those who are 'different'. There was also a widespread fear that a conversation with a member of the clergy would lead to an embarrassing attempt to 'convert' them.

Barriers to Belief

Nick Spencer conducted a similar small-scale in-depth inquiry among 40 people in South London and Nottingham. The participants were selected as self-described non-believers, though militant atheists were excluded. The three groups in London (female 25-44, male 18-24 and male 25-44) were on the 'antagonistic' end of non-belief while the two Nottingham groups (female 18-24 and mixed 45+) were more open and tolerant. The research looked at barriers to belief and identified a number:

- *Hatred of Religion*—'religion' was a dirty word for most of the participants and seen as responsible for "most of the trouble around the world". Word associations included *stuffy, discipline, brainwashing, hypocrites, grasping at straws, child abusers, blinkered, dogmatic, make a donation* and *problem*. Some saw religion as irrelevant because it is old-fashioned, others were more sympathetic when they reflected on individual Christians they had known but they still tended to be negative when they thought of religion and religious people in general.
- *Consumer Spirituality*—spirituality was generally better received: word association brought up things such as *meditation, spiritual healing, yoga, peace, fear, haunted, white light, supernatural, incense, and Ouija boards*. Spirituality can incorporate but

also transcend religion; as one respondent put it, “spirituality is like football; religion is like a football team.” Spirituality was generally seen as focused on the individual person, was consumer-oriented and fairly disposable.

- *Guerrilla Morality*—only religious people can be hypocrites—non-believers have their own moral systems but they keep them to themselves and so can’t be accused of breaching their own values. Perhaps the major shared moral value was tolerance—something that Christians lack. All the participants saw themselves as tolerant; those with whom they disagreed were either intolerant (i.e. less tolerant than me) or ‘politically correct’ (more tolerant than me). Apart from this, being kind and avoiding harm, especially to family and friends, was seen as sufficient to be ‘good’. The idea of having to live according to someone else’s moral code was extremely distasteful; it meant you weren’t thinking for yourself.
- *“Your typical Christian”*—word associations for ‘Christian’ included *patronising, desperate for support, colourless, begging for money, misfits, goody two shoes, holier than thou, well spoken, traditional, old-fashioned, law abiding, approachable* and *doing everything by the book*. Christians are out of touch and unfashionable, though sometimes they try too hard to be cool. They also tend to be self-centred in their outlook and conversation; they are on about religion all the time and aren’t interested in other people. A set of perceptions like these would be a challenge for any image consultancy! Nevertheless, when individual Christians, both lay and ordained, were recollecting the picture was much more positive: they were “fantastic”, “self-effacing”, “cracking people”, “really very nice”. But these experiences do not counter the prevailing negativity; they seem to be seen as the exceptions which prove the rule.
- *Evangelism*—evangelism is seen as almost as big a stumbling block as lack of tolerance. There was a horror of being ‘invaded’ by religious people who wanted to ‘ram religion down your throat’. Indeed, even talking about religion in public could be seen as invasive and threatening. The distaste for evangelism could spread to a cynicism about any kind of church-led social or community care: *they only do it as a publicity stunt...*
- *The Bible*—knowledge of the Bible ranged from sketchy to nonexistent (“..it’s all about another universe—a middle Earth” or “Is that a part of the Bible then, War and Peace?”). But this did not stop people making definitive pronouncements about it: there is no evidence to support any of it; Jesus was not a person but a made up character; it contradicts itself so it can’t be true; it was written a long time after Jesus died and the stories are exaggerated; because there was no national media, things could not be relied upon. Christians believe it without questioning, which just shows how weird they are. The respondents had no conception that the Bible was anything other than one continuous story; the notion of different genres and books within it was absent.
- *Science*—science and religion can’t both be right and science has disproved religion. It might be nice to believe, if only there was some scientific evidence for it. Also, we are materialistic now, whereas in the past people were more mystical so science is better for us now. The theory of evolution was discussed a lot but many people had difficulty with it as well; indeed ‘arguments from design’ actually tipped a few in the direction of belief. Those who were more positive about the theory naturally thought that it disproved religion—especially since religion means a literal interpretation of

Genesis 1-3. However, Richard Dawkins wouldn't draw much comfort either; knowledge of science was sketchy and for some included alien landings and pyramidology!

- *Suffering*—the problem of suffering (theodicy) loomed large in this survey too. Attitudes were complex and varied. Suffering was personal, evoking a mixture of anger and resignation. The usual 'if God existed he wouldn't have let this happen' arguments were put forward—especially in connection with natural disasters for which there seems to be no man-made cause. Nick Spencer notes the strong role of consumerism in this and other arguments: if the church does not deliver the kind of morality I want, it is intolerant; if God does not deliver the kind of world I want, He can't exist. There were some who looked beyond this rather self-centred view and one at least who acknowledged that there is comfort to be found in the church.
- *Other barriers*—a number of other barriers to belief were also highlighted. These included living in a multi-faith world, the problem of reconciling love and hell, a lack of 'proof' and the notion that belief is simply 'wishful thinking'.

Making Sense of Generation Y

The third piece of research is a little different. Whereas both previous studies had a mix of age groups, Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins and Bob Mayo studied the spiritual life of Generation Y. Sociologists and popular writers use a number of designations for the different post-war generations. Firstly there were the Baby Boomers, born roughly between 1945 and 1963 and so called because they were part of the great post-war population bulge. Then came Generation X, also known as the Baby Busters, born roughly between 1963 and 1981; they were followed by Generation Y, or the Millennial Generation, born between 1982 and 2000; and finally (for the present), Generation Z, born after 2000.

Savage, Collins & Mayo interviewed 135 young people, mainly between the ages of 15 and 25, in 26 focus groups throughout England. Of these, 52% were female, 48% male; 94% were white, 6% Black or Asian; 60% defined themselves as non-Christian, 40% as Christian. Their findings showed significant differences between this generation and those which preceded it. For instance, researchers have often spoken of a hunger for spirituality in Gen-X and Boomer people—a 'God-shaped hole' in their lives. None was found for the Gen-Y young people in this study. Instead, the major finding was of what the researchers call a 'happy midi-narrative'. It goes something like this:

"My aim to be happy will be realised through me being myself, and connecting to others and the universe (without harming them). As I do this, I will create a meaningful and happy life. If we all make this individual effort (everyone's own responsibility), each person's happiness will sum into a corporate experience of unity and enjoyment. This happiness is meaningful in itself; it is the Ideal.

"However, bad things can happen in real life that prevent us from attaining this happiness: broken relationships, suffering, loneliness, depression, self-rejection, addiction, injustice, ageing. But each one of us is surrounded by resources of family and close friends who love us unconditionally. The popular arts provide us with valuable resources: information, choice, creativity. With these, we can experience movement from the Actual (real life where bad things can happen) towards the Ideal (happiness)."

The study noted a number of things absent from this story:

- *Dualisms*—the Gen-Y story does not see the universe as a battle between good and evil. Instead, good is what promotes happiness; bad is what prevents happiness for self or others. There is also no distinction between Actual and Ideal (whereas many Christians might distinguish the actuality of this earthly life and the ideal of a heavenly future existence): the Ideal state of happiness will come about as a result of lots of Actual actions. The distinction between self and other is also lessened, as is any dichotomy between intellect and emotion; *feeling* is decisive.
- *A transcendent God*—there is little interest or room for notions of God or ‘alternate’ spiritualities.
- *Romance and sexual fulfilment*—romance and sex are seen as peripheral or problematic.
- *Sin*—there was no traditional concept of sin as moral degradation or rebellion nor of salvation.
- *Fear of death*—death is seen as less of a problem than ageing, which can lead to depression, loss of physical attractiveness and loneliness.
- *Achievement*—although the achievements of stars and celebrities are admired, they are not central to happiness, which is essentially relationally based.

A number of key concepts *are* present in the happy midi-narrative:

- *Caring for life*—The young people in the survey did not relate to any transcendent realm but did care deeply about life, symbolised in babies, children, the planet and animals.
- *Family & Friends*—The family is also a core symbol—“family are there for you”. Although there was uncertainty about ‘horizontal’ roles such as marriage or co-habitation there was a clarity about the importance of traditional generational roles. Identity formation for this group is firmly located within the network of family and friends and although they didn’t have faith in God they did have faith in their family and friends
- *Stars*—stars and celebrities are a living demonstration that the happiness narrative can work. They act, in effect, as gods and goddesses, offering a visible success to which others can aspire. The fact that new stars will emerge with some regularity offers encouragement to those who have not yet achieved the Ideal.
- *Commercialism*—if something becomes too popular or too commercial its value is destroyed. There is an perceived ambiguity about the market economy: on the one hand it enables choice and freedom (both valued); on the other hand it destroys creativity and independence through the pressures of commercialism.
- *Things to be avoided*—anything which gets in the way of happiness is to be avoided. This includes ageing, being depressed and being ‘sad’ or ‘pathetic’.

Savage, Collins & Mayo also looked at the importance assumed by soap operas (especially *EastEnders*) and films. These offer glimpses of what the Ideal world would/will be like. The Actual world is often rather dull and largely free from real danger. The Ideal world is exciting, full of action; a place where the Ideal self can flourish—authentic, strong, good-looking and in control of one’s self.

Soaps, because they were perceived as realistic, tended to help people understand the world and cope with any bad things which came up. Films, being more imaginative, tended

to offer more of the Ideal. Indeed, the most successful films could offer a passing experience of the Ideal which was a foretaste of things to come.

Music and clubbing were also important. Music provides a bridge between the Actual and Ideal self. Music is generally either *enjoyable* or *meaningful*: when rhythm predominates it is the enjoyment of the music which is paramount; when the lyrics encourage reflection on the Actual world they can be valued. Music can be both meaningful and enjoyable if the young people create it themselves (through DJ-ing, mixing or composing); if they identify closely with an artist; or if the music leads to lifestyle choices such as clubbing, or becoming a Punk, Goth or Emo etc.

Clubbing is a transcendent experience which brings the Ideal into the Actual, at least for the time being. The aim is to experience a collective 'high' which can be sustained for some time and then is brought down gently by a sensitive DJ. When clubbing you should be yourself, express yourself through the music and let others be themselves. (For more on this see the 'rave spirituality' section below.)

Alternative Spiritualities

Simon Small tells of some research which estimated that for every metre of shelf space given over to Christian books in shops like Waterstones there are 14 metres given to 'Mind, Body & Spirit'. What is sometimes known (though not to its followers) as "New Age Spirituality" is a hugely popular field—fourteen times more popular than the church if those crude figures are anything to go by!

Alternative spirituality is a blanket term covering a huge range of areas, including Spiritualism and Channelling; Earth Energies; Happiness & Well-Being; UFOs; Jung; Meditation; *A Course in Miracles* (Anon. 1997); Angels; Jesus; and many more. Small suggests that people tend to get interested alternative spirituality in their 20s or later.

Although there is great diversity within the alternative spirituality scene, there are some common themes which characterise many of those who are involved:

- *Starts with a sense that life is meaningless*—the journey into alternative spirituality often begins with a sense of meaninglessness and a disenchantment with life as it is lived—especially if that life is seen a 'successful' on the surface. As a result there is often a disenchantment with contemporary culture.
- *Deep suspicion of authority*—many in the alternative scene have a profound suspicion of authority: it's one reason why they ignore the church. This suspicion of authority extends to science as well as religion.
- *Experience is very important*—in the alternative scene people are enabled and allowed to share their spiritual experiences. This doesn't happen very often in church: Small suggests that many Christians have spiritual experiences which they never share with others—especially their priest or pastor.
- *The experience is private and hidden*—the research by Hay & Hunt and Nick Spencer above has already indicated that people tend to keep their spiritual experiences to themselves. This is certainly true of those exploring alternative spirituality.
- *The sense of journey is fundamental*—one reason why people move from one alternative spirituality to another is that there is a strong sense of journeying. When you have got as much as you can from one approach, you look for another which will take you further.

- *The alternative scene is very eclectic*—because of the need to journey, people take what they can or need from different approaches. In the end, everyone is responsible for structuring their own journey, even when part of it takes place under the supervision of someone more experienced.
- *The focus is on the inner search*—spirituality is seen as focused on inner experience. The aim is variously stated: self-actualisation; enlightenment; being fully present; oneness with the Godhead; nirvana; and so on.
- *It is a very loose and fluid community*—because people move on, and because the focus is on the inward journey, there is rarely any strong sense of community or desire for community action.
- *There is a tremendous sense of mystery*—people in the alternative scene are suspicious of attempts to pin down or explain the world.
- *Spiritual, not religious*—experience, rather than belief, is valued and considered valid.
- *There is often a sense of guidance or calling*—many have a sense of a loving intelligence which leads them from experience to experience.

Rave Spirituality

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871), distinguished two modes: Apollonian and Dionysian. The former, he associated with the plastic arts, the latter with music. *Dream* is associated with Apollo and *ecstasy* with Dionysius. Nietzsche's idea was later used by Ruth Benedict (1989:79) to describe different approaches to religious experience. Apollonian religions are cool and inner-focused; sometimes rational, sometimes mystical. Dionysian religions are hot and body-focused; sometimes ecstatic, sometimes ritualistic.

Alternative spirituality is largely Apollonian in character though there are exceptions—pagans, for instance, may adopt an ecstatic approach with lots of drumming and dancing in their rituals. But as a generalisation it is broadly true—Simon Small notes that most people from the alternative spirituality scene have great difficulty with charismatic worship.

The dance/rave scene, on the other hand, is much more Dionysian. The very name of the psychotropic drug of choice—*ecstasy*—could be seen as a bit of a giveaway! Consider this anonymous description of an experience of using ecstasy for the first time in a club in Vancouver:

When we entered, I knew it was a special place - the good-vibe eye contact everyone was making with each other abounded. As I worked my way into the fierce house music that was throbbing the flesh all around me I stopped and absorbed exactly what I was feeling—connection. The wisp of another's hand, or finger by my body initiated a new bond within this mysterious culture—always followed-up by a comforting glance.

I somehow worked my way into a whole new circle of people and experiences on the floor. From the corner of my head I sensed the warmth radiating from an older (probably early 50's) woman slightly detached from the people I was currently grooving with. We caught each other's eyes for what seemed like hours as we held still and allowed the room, the lights, the people, to just orbit around our perfectly still bodies. I silently mouthed to her "please dance with me". She silently mouthed back to me "I already was".

This definitive point was the pivot-point for my evening. I truly understood at that infinitely microscopic point in time what it meant for myself (emotionally) and others to come together through such an act of raw, unplugged, uninhibited spirit.

Robin Sylvan's study (2005) shows the breadth of spirituality in rave culture in the US and Europe. Many of the people he interviewed openly acknowledge the spiritual aspect:

There's a feeling of making a connection between different realms somehow and allowing a flow to happen between those worlds. (Jason Keehn in Sylvan 2005:87)

While Michael Mahahan sounds quite Pauline:

I became a little less human and a little bit more spirit. (Sylvan 2005:89)

Sylvan argues that raves are often heavily ritualised and explicitly spiritual. More and more raves begin and end with ceremonies and there seems to be a trend for constructing 'altars' to provide a physical focal point just as the DJ is a musical and spiritual focus. The role of the DJ as 'priest' is emphasised by a number of those interviewed in this study. One DJ, James Frazier, says:

*Usually I will say a prayer to the universe, saying I just ask to be a vessel, you know, and get out of the way, and just to give as much as I can to those people that are here... There'll be situations where I've pulled the wrong record, but it turned out to be the right one. And I realize, **Oh, it's not me;** you know what I mean? It's like I'm doing this, I'm just a vessel, and it's doing itself.* (Sylvan 2005:116)

According to Sylvan, there are seven characteristics of rave culture (2005:11ff):

- *A combination of sacred and secular*—while many raves have a sense of the sacred, and even some explicitly religious components, there are also very strong secular aspects such as 'partying', entertainment, being seen in the right places, commercial gain, and so on. The two co-exist and participants don't usually find any conflict between them.
- *Expression within the arts*—music, dance and visual arts come together in a unique fusion in rave culture. Rave is seen as an aesthetic experience and top DJs have much kudos as creative artists.
- *Expression within popular culture*—raves are not elitist but cut across divisions in social class, gender and ethnicity. They also attract millions of people across the world. They connect strongly with many aspects of contemporary culture, being youth-oriented, focusing on experience, global in scope, and so on.
- *Emphasis on experience over content*—although rave is experienced as an aesthetic experience it is not viewed dispassionately but valued for the visceral quality of the experience. This experience is often enhanced with drugs such as MDMA (ecstasy)—a major difference from most other forms of alternative spirituality, which are very hostile to drug taking of any kind.
- *The central importance of the body*—the rave experience is an *embodied* experience; indeed it is a danced experience. This celebration of the physical is also uncharacteristic in most traditional and alternative forms of spirituality.
- *Use of digital technology, multimedia, and global communication systems*—raves tend to be hi-tech affairs. Lights, sound systems, video projectors and other optical effects play a key part in the rave experience. Rave culture is also firmly located within the nexus of the continuous communication networks (principally operating through the mobile phone) which characterise large sections of contemporary culture.

- *Postmodern, hybrid, cut-and-past nature*—raves draw from a range of sources. They are self-consciously not located in any one subculture or tradition but draw widely to produce self-constructed eclectic mix which is both new and old.

Given all this it is little wonder that the group *Faithless* can record a track entitled, *God is a DJ!*

Conclusions

The studies we have looked at in this session give us some sense of the key themes which underpin people's perceptions of religion and their approach to what we might call spirituality. Very few of those involved in the studies were over 45 and it is clear that the younger the people, the more distant they are likely to be from 'church'.

Some clear themes emerge but within them is a great diversity of shades of opinion—and what the individual might say in private can be quite different from what they might say in public. In the next session we will attempt to grapple with how we might connect with those who hold the views explored in this session and how we might share the truths of the gospel with them.

Session Three Notes—Contemporary Spirituality

Details of the first study can be found in Hay & Hunt 2000.

The term *bricolage* is used in Levi-Strauss 1966:16ff.

On the question of theodicy, see also Philip Pullman’s hugely popular trilogy, *His Dark Materials*.

The Nick Spencer study can be found in Spencer 2002.

More details of the Generation Y research can be found in Savage et al 2006. For this session I used an unpublished summary of their research entitled *Theology Through the Arts for a New Generation* produced in November 2002.

Some other figures which shed some light on spirituality in contemporary Britain:

72% of population believe in God or ‘Higher Power’ (Social Trends 28, 1998)

I know that God really exists and I have no doubt about it	21%
While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God	23%
I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others	14%
I don’t believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind	14%
I don’t know whether there is a God and I don’t believe there is any way to find out	15%
I don’t believe in God	10%
Not answered	3%

Music Lifestyles

(These notes are based on various Wikipedia entries.)

Punk: Punk rock (often referred to simply as punk) is an anti-establishment rock music genre and movement that developed between 1974 and 1976 in the US, UK and Australia. In reaction to the increasingly elaborate rock of the late 60s and early 70s, punk rock bands created fast, hard-edged music, typically with short songs, stripped-down instrumentation, and often political, anti-government lyrics. Punk embraces a DIY ethic, with many bands self-producing their recordings and distributing them through informal channels. By late 1976, bands such as the Ramones, in New York City, and the Sex Pistols and The Clash, in London, were recognized as the vanguard of a new musical movement.



By the beginning of the 1980s, even faster, more aggressive styles had become the predominant mode of punk rock. Musicians identifying with or inspired by punk also pursued a broad range of other variations, giving rise to post-punk and the alternative rock movement. By the turn of the century, new pop punk bands such as Green Day were bringing the genre widespread popularity decades after its inception.

Goth: By the late 1970s, there were a few post-punk bands in the United Kingdom labelled ‘gothic.’ However, it was not until the early 1980s that gothic rock became its own subgenre within post-punk, and that followers of these bands started to come together as a distinctly

recognizable movement. The scene appears to have taken its name from an article published in UK rock weekly *Sounds*: “The Face of Punk Gothique”, written by Steve Keaton and published on February 21 1981. The opening of the Batcave in London’s Soho in July 1982 provided a prominent meeting point for the emerging scene. The term ‘Batcaver’ was later used to describe old-school goths.



By the 1990s, the term ‘goth’ and the boundaries of the associated subculture had become more contentious. New subcultures emerged, or became more popular, some of them being conflated with the goth subculture by the general public and the popular media. This conflation was primarily owing to similarities of appearance, social customs, and the fashions of the subcultures, rather than the musical genres of the bands associated with them. As time went on, the term was extended further in popular usage, sometimes to define groups that had neither musical nor fashion similarities to the original gothic subculture.

The response of these newer groups to the older subculture varies. Some, being secure in a separate subcultural identity, express offence at being called ‘goth’ in the first place, while others choose to join the existing subculture on its own terms. Still others have simply ignored its existence, and decided to appropriate the term ‘goth’ themselves, and redefine the idea in their own image. Even within the original subculture, changing trends have added to the complexity of attempting to define precise boundaries.

Emo: In the mid-1980s, the term emo described a subgenre of hardcore punk which originated in the Washington, D.C. music scene. In later years, the term emocore, short for ‘emotional hardcore’, was also used to describe the emotional performances of bands in the Washington, D.C. scene and some of the offshoot regional scenes such as Rites of Spring, Embrace, One Last Wish, Beefeater, Gray Matter, Fire Party, and later, Moss Icon.



Starting in the mid-1990s, the term emo began to refer to those bands which followed the influences of Fugazi, with a more indie rock style of emo, more melodic and less chaotic. The so-called ‘indie emo’ scene survived until the late 1990s, as many of the bands either disbanded or shifted to mainstream styles. As a result, the term ‘emo’ became a vaguely defined identifier rather than a specific genre of music.

At the end of the 1990s, the underground emo scene had almost entirely disappeared. However, the term emo was still being bandied about in mainstream media, almost always attached to the few remaining 90s emo acts, including Jimmy Eat World.

2003 saw the success of Chris Carrabba, the former singer of emo band Further Seems Forever. Despite musically being more aligned to the singer songwriter school, Carraba found himself part of the emerging ‘popular’ emo scene. His music featured lyrics founded in deep diary-like outpourings of emotion. While certainly emotional, the new ‘emo’ had a far greater appeal amongst adolescents than its earlier incarnations.

At the same time, use of the term 'emo' expanded beyond the musical genre, which added to the confusion surrounding the term. The word 'emo' became associated with open displays of strong emotion. Common fashion styles and attitudes that were becoming idiomatic of fans of similar 'emo' bands also began to be referred to as 'emo.' As a result, bands that were loosely associated with 'emo' trends or simply demonstrated emotion began to be referred to as emo. The term has now become so broad that it has become nearly impossible to describe what exactly qualifies as 'emo'.

Alternative spirituality

Much of this section is based on notes taken by me at Simon Small's workshop on *Understanding Contemporary Spirituality*, held at the Norwich Centre for Christian Meditation on 1st March 2007.

Simon Small suggests that people only get involved in alternative spiritualities from the mid-teens onwards. The Gen Y survey covered people up to the age of 25. Although they found no 'God-shaped hole' this may be an age-related experience rather than particular to Generation Y. It would be interesting to track those born after 1982 and see whether they, too, find a sense of meaninglessness and alienation which leads them into a spiritual journey of some kind.

Rave spirituality

The anonymous quote comes from <http://www.csp.org/nicholas/A66.html> There are further resources on this site.

Following are the lyrics to dance act Faithless' track, *God Is A DJ*:

*This is my church
This is where I heal my hurt*

*It's a natural grace
Of watching young life shape
It's in minor keys
Solutions and remedies
Enemies becoming friends
When bitterness ends
This is my church*

*This is my church
This is where I heal my hurt*

This is my church

*This is my church
This is where I heal my hurt*

*It's in the world I become
Content in the hum
Between voice and drum
It's in the church*

*The poetic justice of cause and effect
Respect, love, compassion*

This is my church

*This is where I heal my hurt
For tonight
god is a DJ
god is a DJ*

See: <http://net127.com/2003/03/24/this-is-where-i-heal-my-hurt>

Further reading

Baigent 2003, *The Y Church Report*—report written for the Catholic diocese of Northampton. It looks at the cultural and faith worlds of young Catholics, and how effective youth ministry might be conducted.

Croft et al 2005, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age* also contains some interesting material on contemporary spirituality, focusing on the 'Beyond the Fringe' research project carried out in the diocese of Coventry in 2003.

McQuillan 2004, *Youth Spirituality*—an Australian report looking at the spirituality of young people in Australia and the UK. He used David Hay's 'spiritual experience' questionnaire with a groups of pupils some mixed catholic schools and an all-boys independent school. In both groups the number of positive responses was very high.

Rave Culture and Religion, edited by Graham St John, Routledge, 2004, may be worth reading (I haven't yet). See <http://www.edgecentral.net/rcr.htm>

Partridge 2004, *New Religions*—a comprehensive and readable guide to hundreds of movements of the spirit across the world.