



What is Caféchurch For? Part I: The Situation

Caféchurch
Melbourne
1/4/14

Reminder Of Our Values

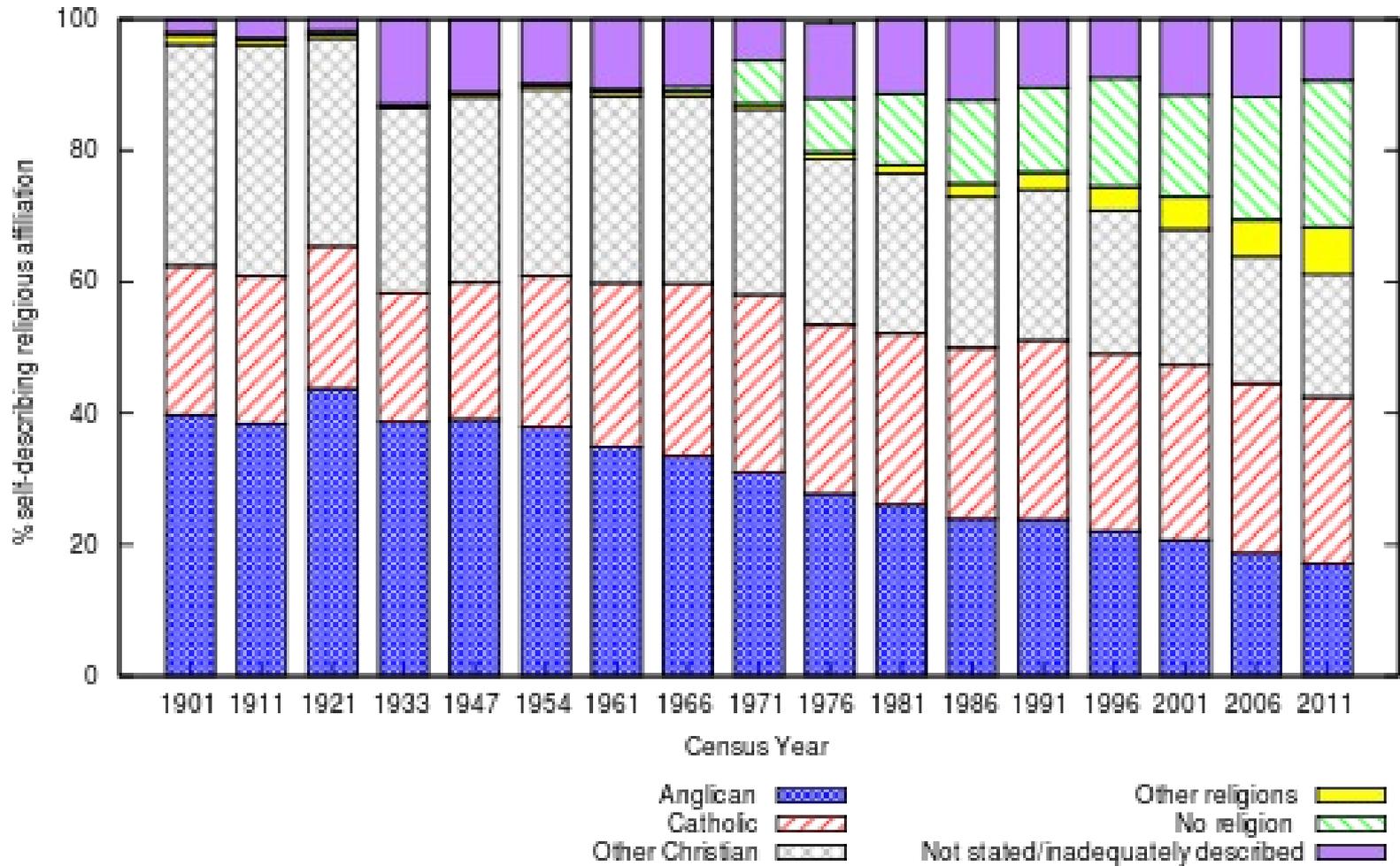
Reclaiming secular space: How chatting over coffee in a bar is in fact a radically incarnational statement.

Open-ness, inclusivity, and acceptance: All are welcome, regardless of doubts and questions.

Authenticity: We want to be real – real with each other, real in our dealings with the world, real with God. How can we free ourselves of masks and encourage one another?

We're all in this together: Some people like to call it “Every Member Ministry”, but we're going to experiment with Church as Wikipedia.

Major religious affiliations described in Australian censuses

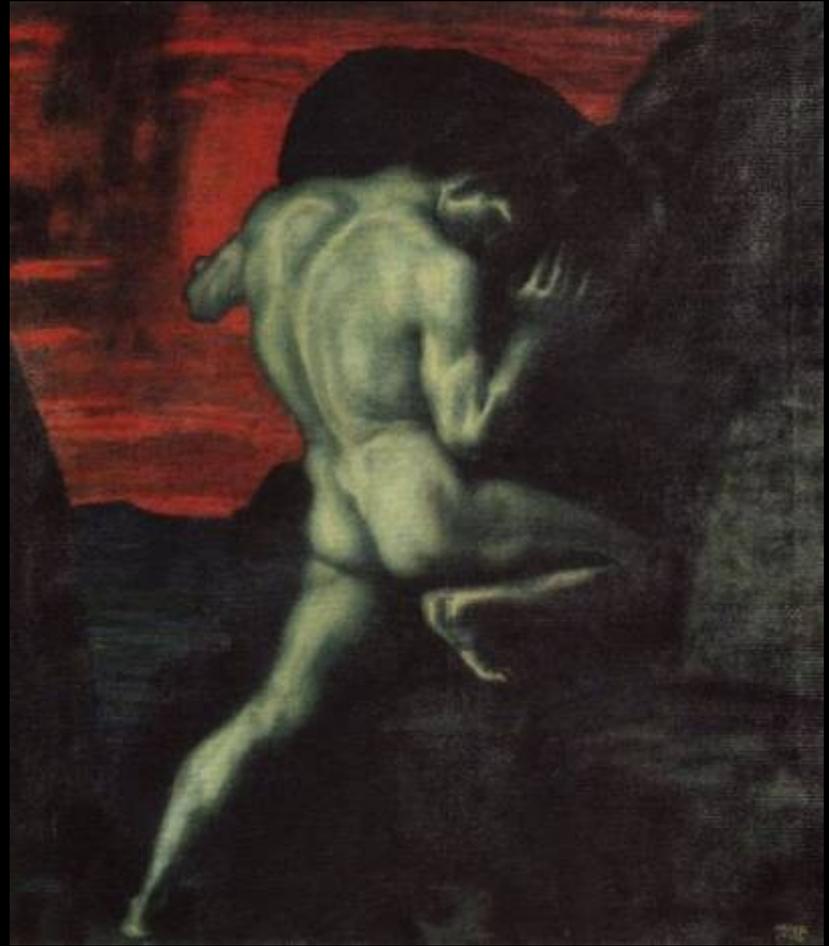


Some Numbers

- It's hard to get reliable numbers...
- 8% of people go to church at least once a month in 2013 (http://mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/church_attendance_in_a)
- According to the National Church Life Survey, between 1950 and 2007 monthly church attendance declined from 44% to 17%. [40] (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irreligion_in_Australia)
- in [Australia](#), the figure is only 20% of the population going to church once a month (and 10% weekly); (in 2013) (<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/05/08/3754700.htm>)

Two Aspects

- End of Christendom = end of privileged position of the church
- Modernity = the end of taken-for-grantedness



Summary

- We are moving from a situation where virtually everyone goes to church to a situation where hardly anyone does.
- Church is no longer “taken for granted”



Christendom

- The church(es) have a recognised place in society.
- The assumption is that “everyone” will get married in a church, get their children christened, probably go at least Christmas and Easter, and possibly more frequently
- Christianity is the common, taken-for-granted narrative of culture



Question

- How many of your friends are practicing Christians?
- How many of your married friends were married in church (or by ministers?)
- If you have friends who have children, did they have them baptised (or similar?)



History

- The situation is complex, but here are some of the principle events / markers
 - The Enlightenment
 - WW I & II
 - The Sixties
 - Multiculturalism

(Please note: The aim here is not to criticize any of these things, merely to name them.)



The Enlightenment

- The intellectual foundations of the end of Christendom can be traced (at least) to the Enlightenment
- “Dare to know” – question what is taught to you by authorities, including spiritual authority



World War I & II

- WW I was The death blow to the Victorian confidence in Christianity and moral progress
- How could God be on both sides of the war?
- How could any of the claims of culture be taken seriously after the mud and horror of the trenches?
- Add to that the horror of Auschwitz



The Sixties

- Unleashing of many social changes
 - Vietnam War
 - Challenging of traditional morality
 - The Pill
 - The end of obscenity trials (*Oz*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*)
 - Questioning of authority (e.g. *Private Eye* and *Monty Python*)
 - Consumerism
 - Gramscian “long march” through the institutions



Multiculturalism and Immigration

- Because we now have many opportunities to meet people of other faiths (or none), it is hard to take Christian faith for granted
- We are constantly exposed to other ways of living via all pervasive media and connectedness
- We are encouraged to celebrate other cultures, and Western culture is no longer normative



Question

- What other historical events or processes can you think of that have contributed to our current cultural situation?



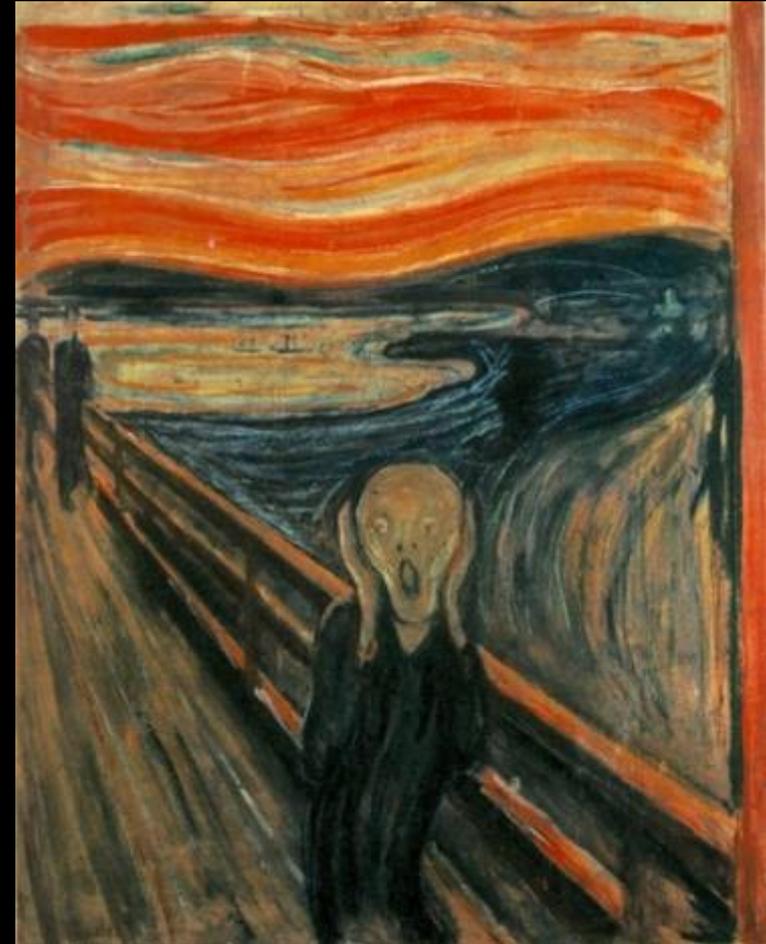
The Australian Perspective

- Australia is an Enlightenment culture – Christendom was starting to fade, and the colonies were formed with the deliberate intent of humanistically reforming the convicts.
- Religion comes from outside – prison chaplains, the spiritual trappings of the colonial state.
- Australia never had a “great awakening” like the USA or UK



Secularism

- The “withering away of faith.”
- In the 60s, people took it for granted
- It has not happened. God (or at least “spirituality”) is back, if indeed He ever went away.
- Alister McGrath argues that this is why people like Dawkins are so angry. Religion was supposed to be dead by now!



The End of Taken-For-Granted-ness

- If you live in a traditional culture, most things are just *there* – where you live, what you do for a living, where and what you worship.
- Modernity means that *all* of those things are up for grabs.



A Quote That Sums It Up

“I can be sure that is what many of you think because your generation of high-IQ, college-educated young people, like mine 50 years ago, has been as thoroughly socialized to be secular as your counterparts in preceding generations were socialized to be devout. Some of you grew up with parents who weren't religious, and you've never given religion a thought. Others of you followed the religion of your parents as children but left religion behind as you were socialized by college.”

on.wsj.com/1dD0p5l

Question

- How many of your friends and acquaintances does that quote describe?
- The writer is American – do you think it applies to the Australian context?



Modern Western Capitalism

- Drives individualism, atomism
- It thrives on your discontent – because there is always something new to buy
- Wants you to sit alone in your lounge room, watching commercials on your wide screen TV, eating convenience foods.
- Or, alternatively, taking part in paid events with lots of merchandizing – stadium concerts, spectator sports
- The dynamic of capitalism is to transfer as much as possible to the cash economy.



The Rise of “Spirituality”

- In this sense, privatised, individualistic, consumerist
- “The reason for this shift of accent from religious institution to the intimacy of spiritual experience is that such a meditation is the ideological form that best fits today’s global capitalism.”
- Slavoj Zizek, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic*



• rainandtherhinoceros.wordpress.com/2009/05/27/zizek-on-capita

Question

- Do you describe yourself as “religious” or “spiritual”?
- Do you use different terms in different circumstances?
Elaborate.



Reactions to Modernity

- Buying into it completely, and making its concerns the primary thing.
- Reacting against it and retreating into a (non-existent) golden age of certainty.
- Doing our best to engage with it intelligently



Contradiction of “Christendom”

John 18:36 Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’

Post-Modernity

- “Incredulity towards meta-narratives”
- There are many, equally valid stories in our cultures.
- I query whether this is still an adequate description of our culture
- Certainly the optimism of “modernity” – that we can solve all our problems by judicious use of technology and social reform – is highly challenged (e.g. “limits on growth”)

