



BRIAN McLAREN

GOOD  
UNBOUND

THEOLOGY  
IN THE WILD

THE  
GALÁPAGOS  
ISLANDS

ON  
LOCATION

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

BRIAN D. McLAREN





















change happens.



what future for Christianity?

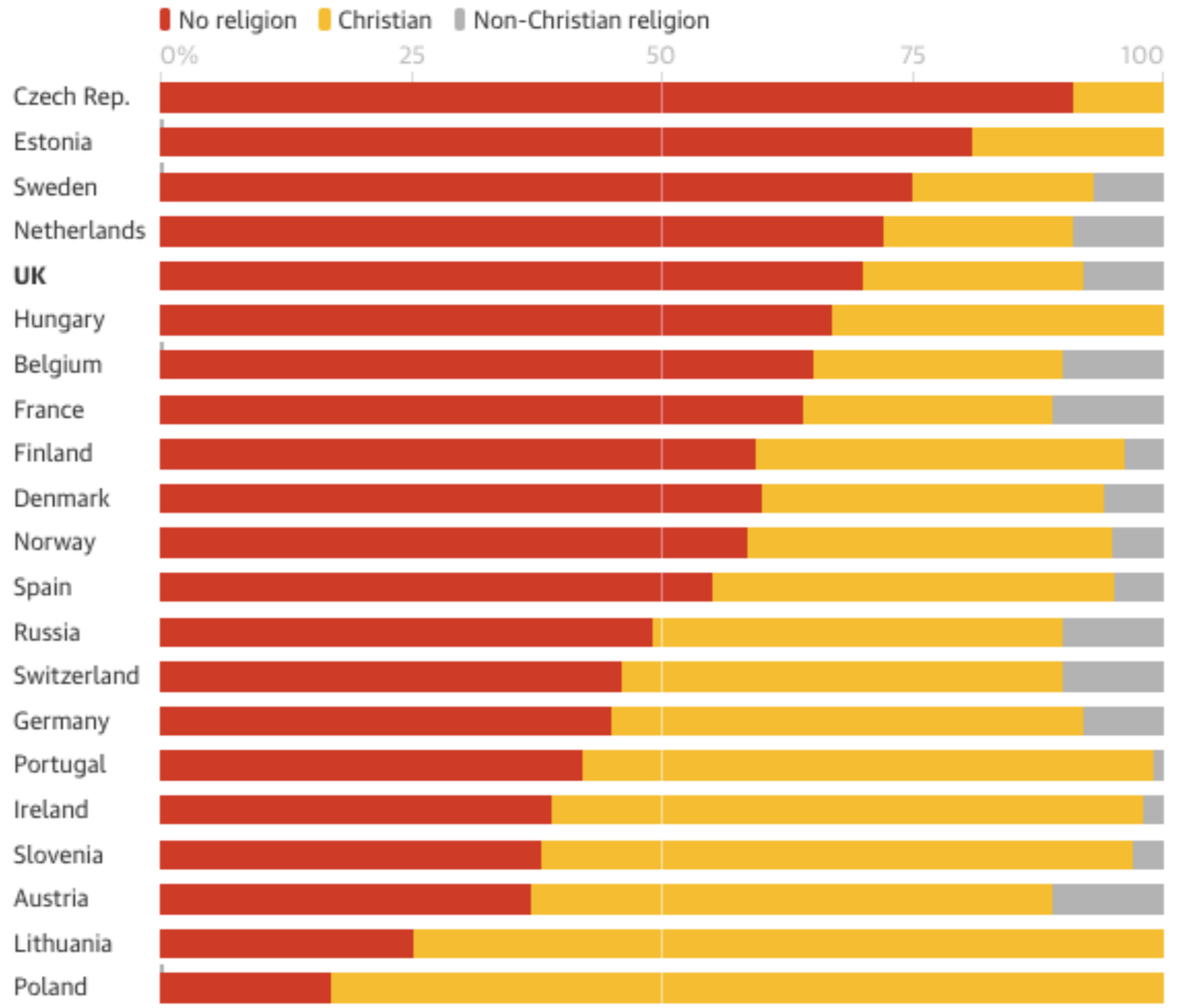


Patterns of growth and decline ...



# 70% of young people in the UK identify with no religion

How 16- to 29-year-olds self-identify, %



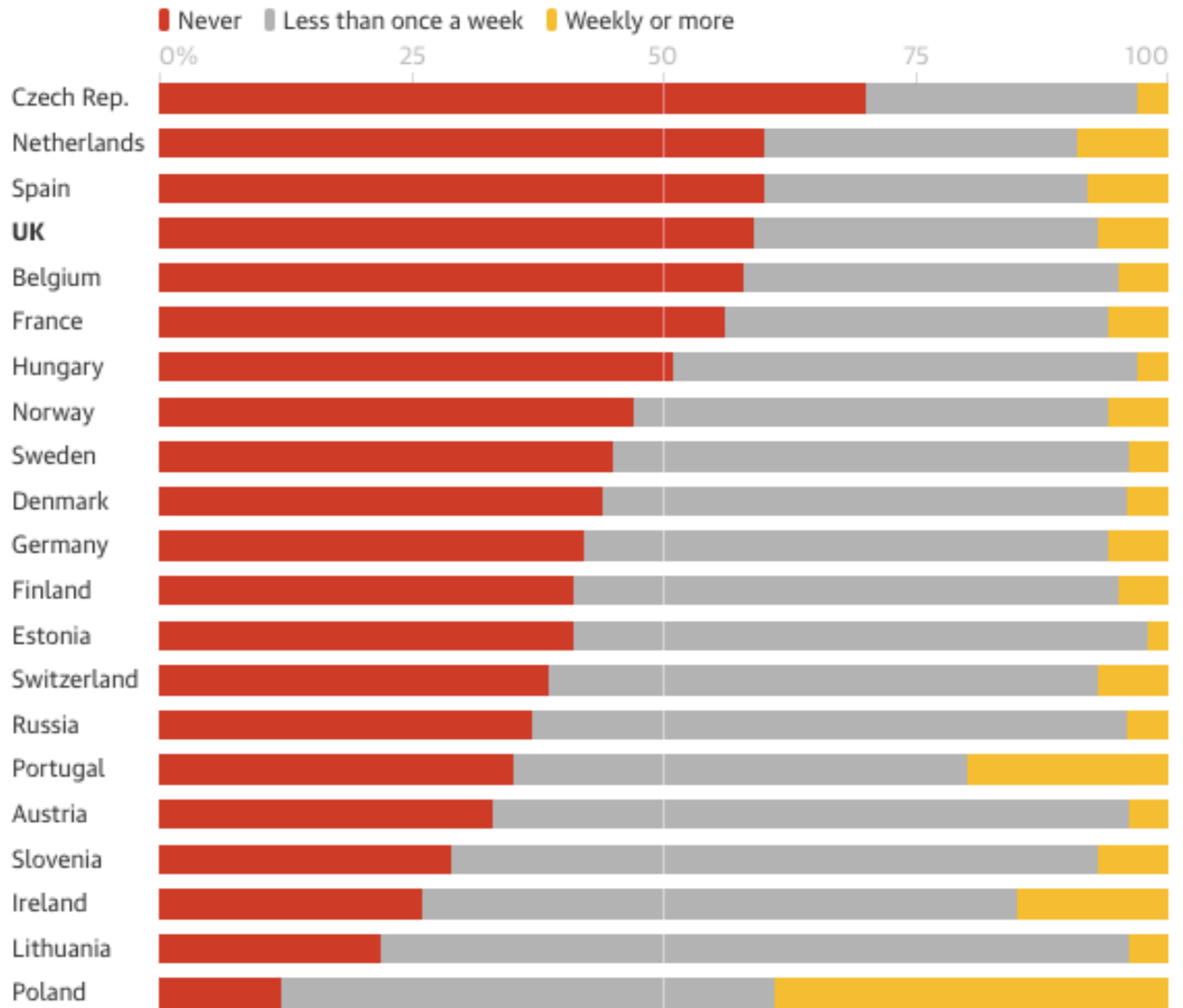
Guardian Graphic | Source: St Mary's University, Twickenham

Europe:



# 59% of young people in the UK never attend religious services

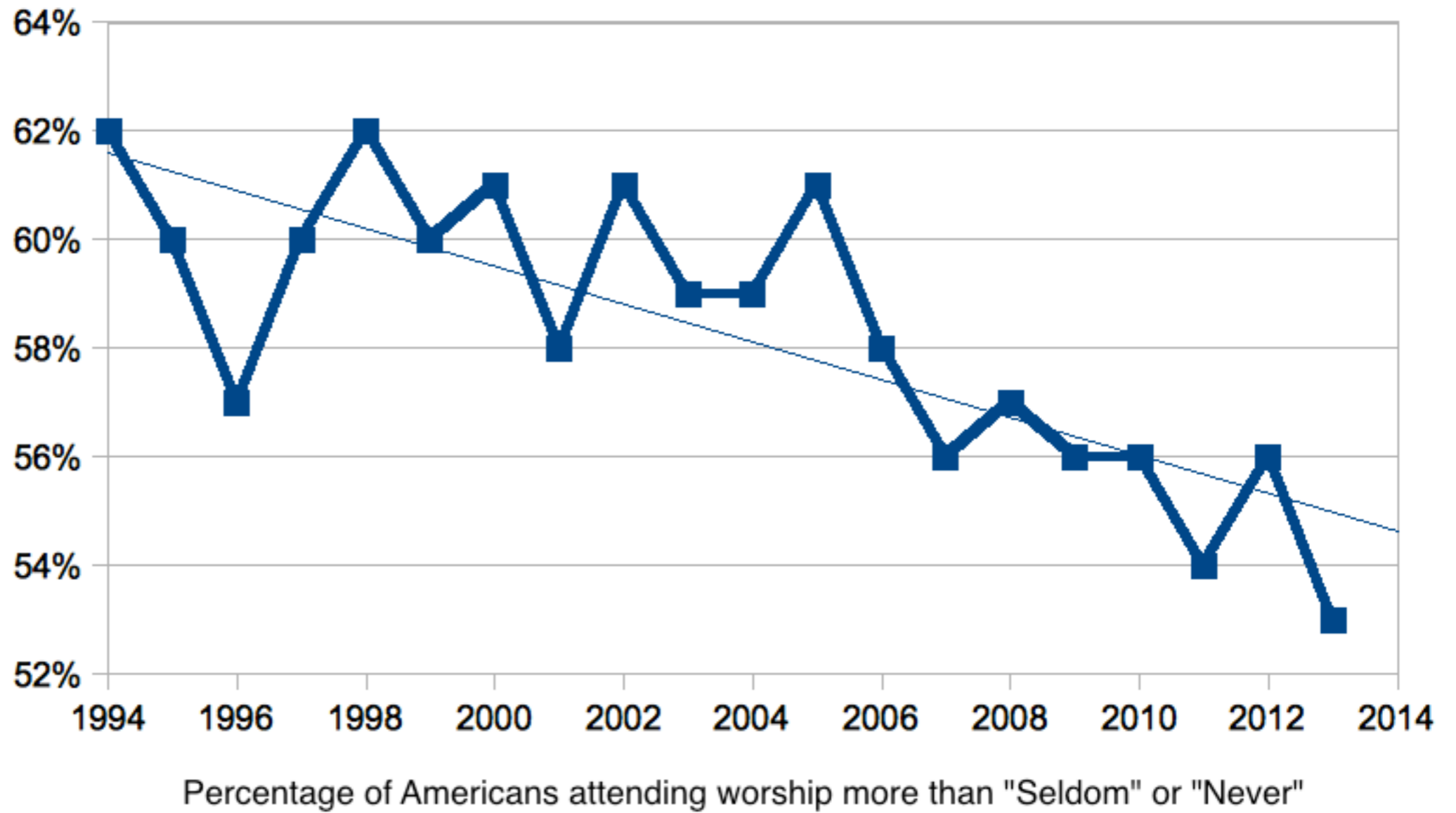
Frequency of attendance, outside of special occasions, 16- to 29-year-olds



Europe:

US

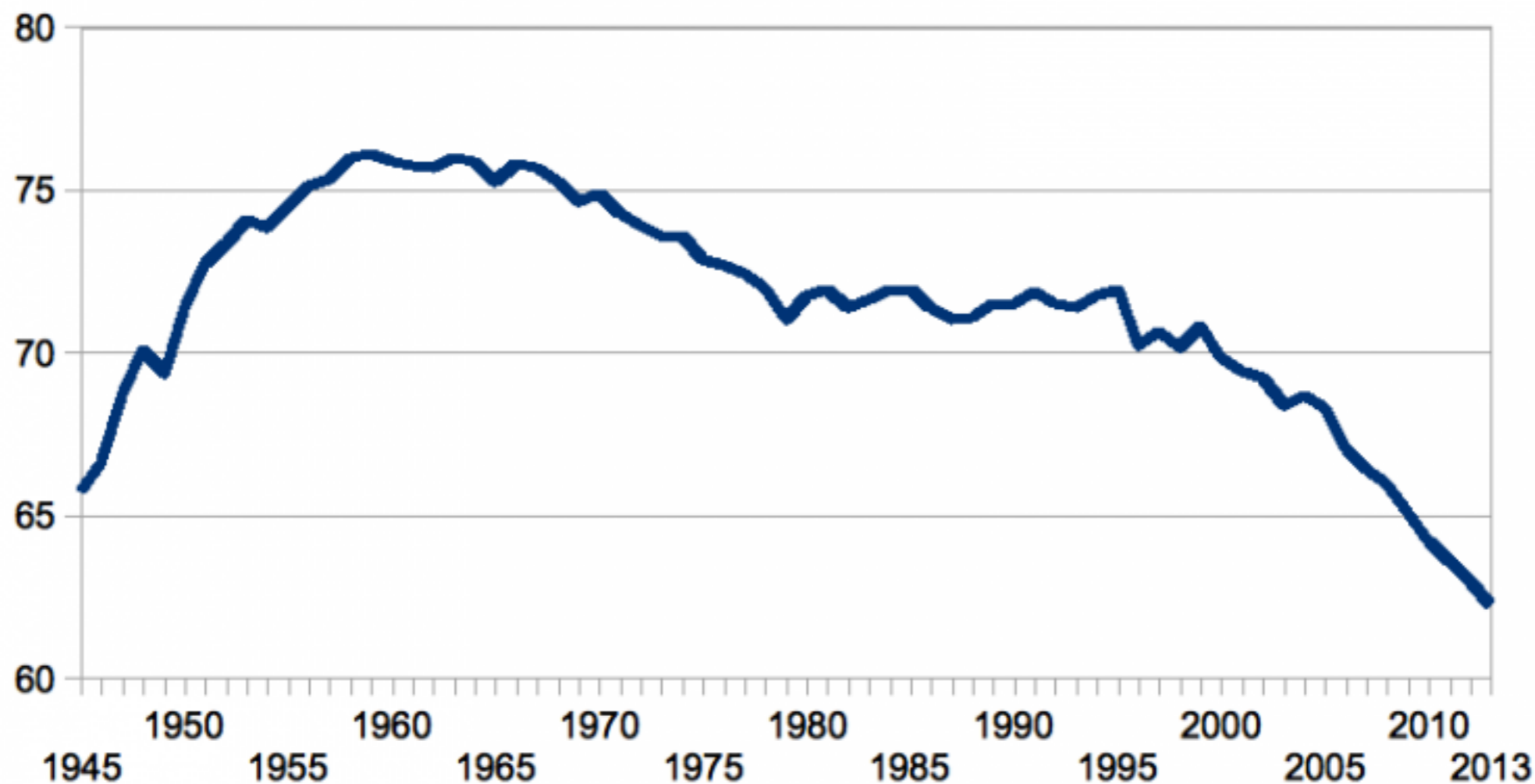
## Decline of Church Attendance



Graph by Corner of Church & State, an RNS blog  
Source: Gallup



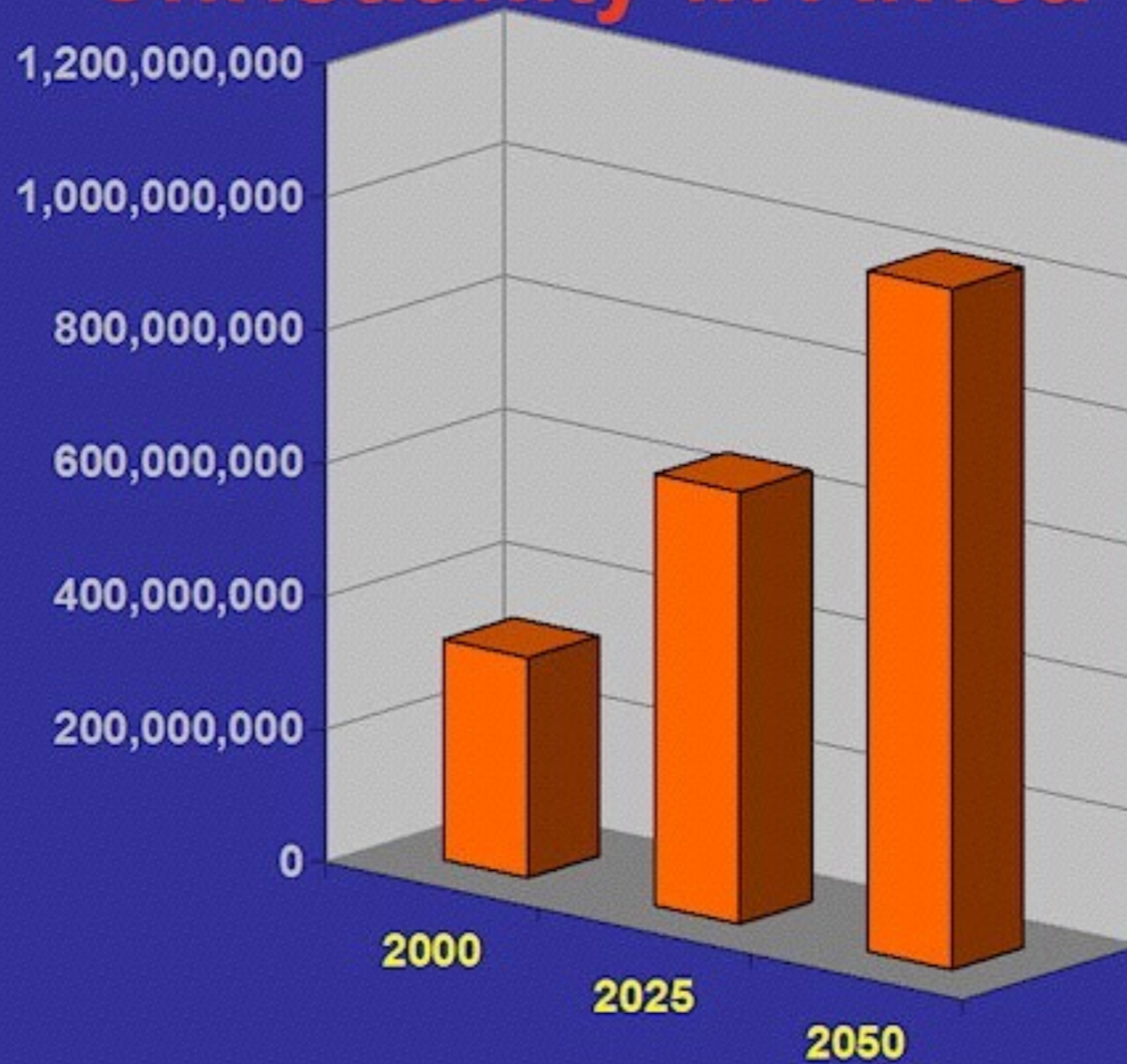
# The rise and fall of religiosity in the United States



The index indicates the relative level of religiosity in the United States.  
The scale of religiosity index is relative; values can be compared across years.  
The values of the scale are roughly equivalent to a percentage change across all religiosity items.

Graphic by Corner of Church & State, an RNS blog  
It is not offered for republication.

# Christianity in Africa





Will Christianity survive and thrive?  
What kind of Christianity will predominate?

Will Christianity survive and thrive?  
What kind of Christianity will predominate?

Why these questions are dangerous.



Optimism: Complacency

Pessimism: Resignation & adjustment

Why these questions are dangerous.

## **Continuing trends:**

Continuing decline in West,  
with large reserves of money.

Possible eventual decline in Global  
South.

Continuing trends:

**Worst-case scenario(s):**

Rise in White Nationalist Christianity  
& Its Allies





## **Continuing trends:**

Continuing decline in West

## **Worst-case scenario(s):**

Rise in White Nationalist Christianity  
& Its Allies

**Desirable future(s):**

**A new kind of Christianity ...  
a global spiritual movement  
rooted in Christ  
for the good of the world.**

Continuing trends:

Worst-case scenario(s):



# Faith that Addresses our Four Global Crises:

Planet

Poverty

Peace

Politics & Religion

How do we get there?

stasis/regression/change  
resistance

revolution/  
reformation/renewal

evolution  
embrace of change as growth  
toward maturity

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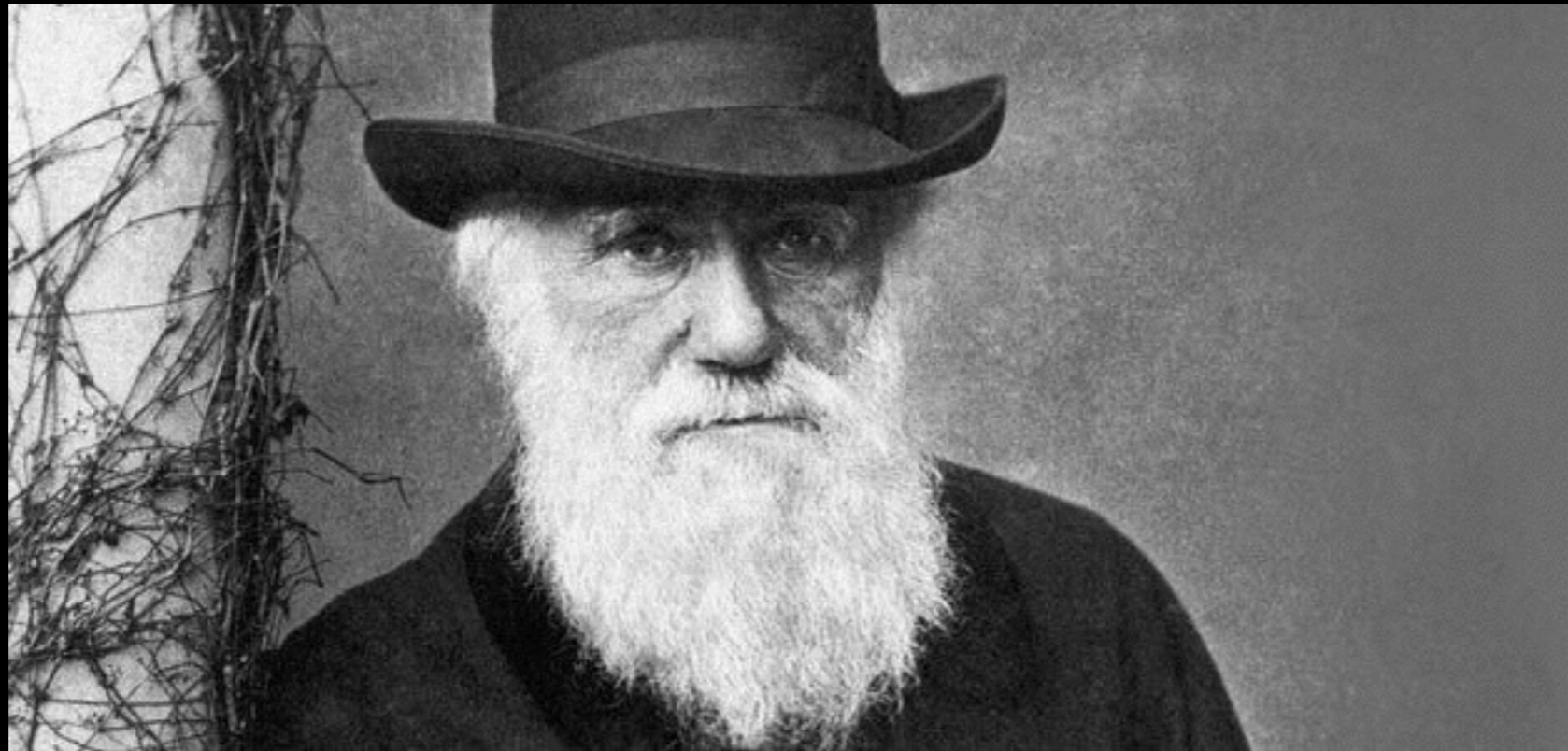
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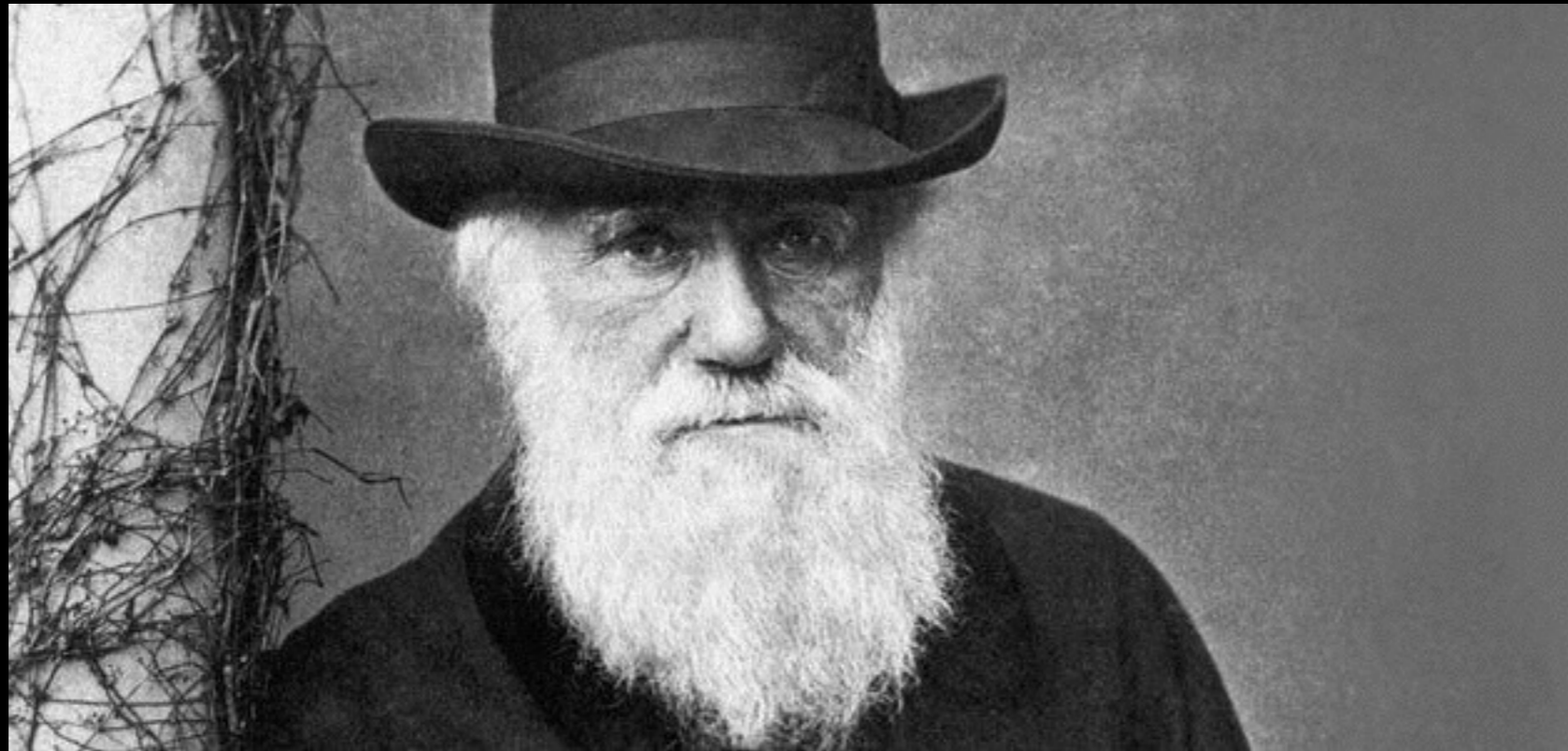
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Charles Darwin  
1809-1882

Origin of the Species  
1859



survival of the fittest?

But in the hands of both capitalists and Marxists, *fit* came to be understood as athletic, strong, fast, tough, aggressive, powerful, dominating. So the toughest CEO survives. The most ruthless corporation survives. The most vicious and competitive politician wins the election and rules the nation. The most aggressive movement, army, party, ideology, or dictator kills off its competition and survives. A contemporary global strongman perfectly articulated this view in a recent tweet:

The weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong, for good or for ill, survive. The strong are respected, and alliances are made with the strong, and in the end peace is made with the strong.

But again, we must realize this obsession with superior strength wasn't what Charles (or Alfred Wallace) meant by survival of the fittest. Not even close.



It's true, inter- and intra-species competition does play a role in natural selection. But ruthless kill-or-be-killed competition is neither the only nor the most important component of the process. Instead of *survival of the most ruthless*, we would be truer to Darwin, Wallace, and the biological revolution they unleashed to say *survival of the best adapted*. The individuals and species that are best adapted to their environment, the individuals and species that can live most harmoniously in their environment, they are the ones that live long enough to reproduce, thus ensuring the survival of their kind.

I can't help but wonder: could our economic systems—whether leaning toward Marx and Engels on the left or Smith and Keynes on the right—have programmed us to reduce Darwin's rich theory to slogans like *the struggle for survival, the survival of the fittest, and nature, red in tooth and claw* for their own benefit? Could it be that these systems need us to frame life in those desperate terms of perpetual scarcity, so that we will produce, produce, produce? Isn't that what all contemporary economic systems need us to do most—like anxious drones, to produce, consume, produce, consume, until we exhaust ourselves and die?

Survival of the fittest -  
Fastest, strongest, most aggressive?

Survival of those who fit best ...  
Most harmonious fit  
Best adapted



# Survival of the Best Adapted

1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable

1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
3. Survival of the Most Attractive

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2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
3. Survival of the Most Attractive
4. Survival of the Most Diverse



1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
3. Survival of the Most Attractive
4. Survival of the Most Diverse
5. Survival of the Best Organized

1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
3. Survival of the Most Attractive
4. Survival of the Most Diverse
5. Survival of the Best Organized
6. Survival of the Most Cooperative

Evolutionary theory now has a bridge to ecological theory, and ecological theory brings us full circle to realize (finally) that human economies are activities that take place in an environment. Any organism that does not fit harmoniously in its environment will end up as a fossil, as dust blowing across a desert—including the people who submit their brains and chain their lives to inflexible ideologies like contemporary Marxism and capitalism.

Both systems, after all, arose in the industrial era, an era that produced short-term wealth measured only in money, first by plundering the long-term and multifaceted wealth of the earth, and second by exploiting the labor of vulnerable people. Even though the two systems differed in their plans for distributing that wealth, they shared more assumptions than they realized, assumptions that may not be adaptable to the postindustrial, ecological civilization that we humans must create if we are to survive.

To fashion that civilization, we must pay increasing attention to long-term environmental health measured in well-being, not just short-term wealth measured in money, and we must learn to cooperate with our fellow humans, our fellow species, and the physical systems of the earth itself for the common good. We can call this new cooperative economy anything we want to: ecological capitalism, reformed capitalism, organic capitalism, organic Marxism. Whatever we call it, if we don't develop an economy and a civilization that fit our environment, we simply won't survive.

Perhaps I'm stretching things, but I have to allow Jesus to get a word in edgewise here. I can't help but hear him say of the dominant and anxious economic empires of our day:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear, or about the GDP, whether it is heading up or down. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing, and well-being more than the value of your stock portfolios? Look at the marine iguanas on the black volcanic rocks; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet the Creator, working through the harmonious and bountiful ecosystem of creation, feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing?



Consider the guineafowl pufferfish of the reef, how she grows; she neither invests in growth funds nor runs her economy on fossil fuels, yet I tell you, even the sexiest movie star, the wealthiest athlete, and the most powerful politician, in all their self-congratulatory glory, aren't as beautiful as she. Look, if God makes beautiful the fish on the reef, which are alive today and may die in the next El Niño event, will God not much more take care of you—you micro-faiths? So listen: stop worrying, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What is the GDP forecast?” For the economic exploiters and environmental plunderers strive for all these things. But the Creator, through the amazing evolutionary processes that surround you, gave you life and knows what you need.

You need a higher, deeper, and wiser ambition than the competitive drive trumpeted by this suicidal economy. Seek first and foremost to fit harmoniously within the just and bountiful ecosystem of God, and everything you need will be given to you as well.

Really. I mean it. Don't let anxiety drive you into a life of ruthless competition in the tooth-and-claw struggle for survival of the most aggressive. That game is over. Learn to live in the real world, the world of marine iguanas, Galápagos finches, and guineafowl pufferfish. That's the way to live, today and always.

The historical challenge

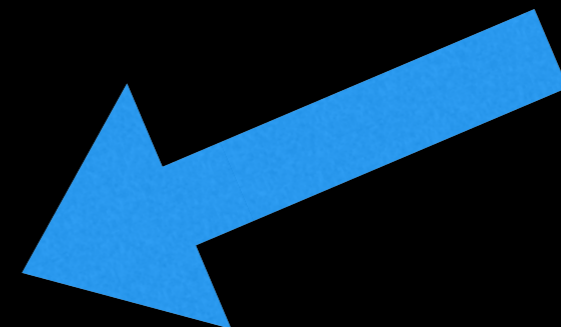
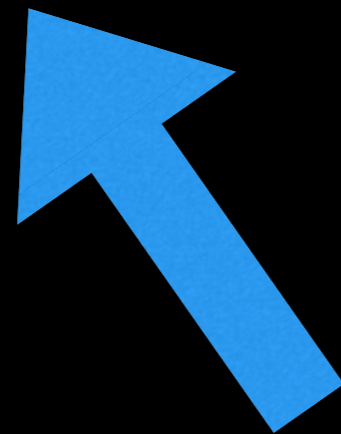
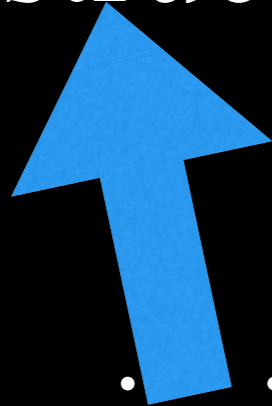
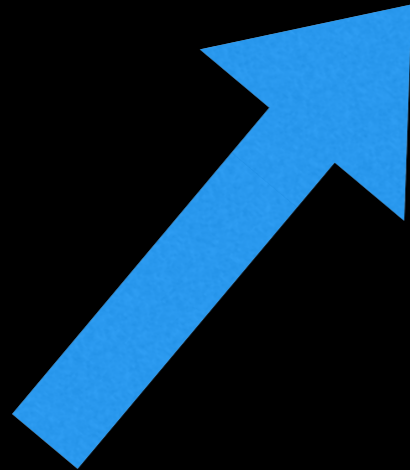
The doctrinal challenge

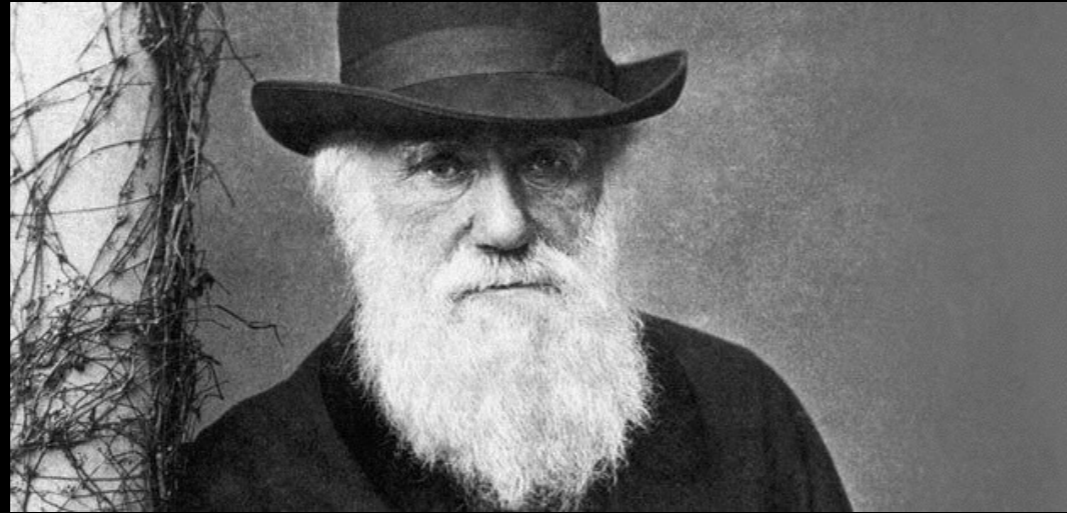
The structural challenge

The missional challenge

The liturgical challenge

The spiritual challenge





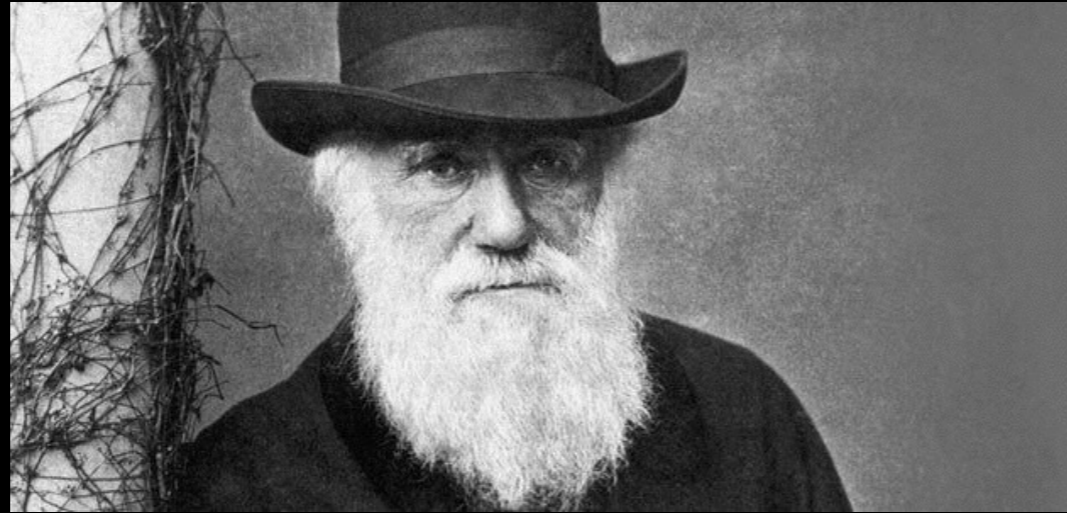












Repent = Evolve!



You and I play a part  
in what Christian faith  
will become.











# I Worried

*Mary Oliver*

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers  
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn  
as it was taught, and if not how shall  
I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,  
can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows  
can do it and I am, well,  
hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,  
am I going to get rheumatism,  
lockjaw, dementia?

Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.  
And gave it up. And took my old body  
and went out into the morning,  
and sang.