

Secular People

The secularization process, by which the Church lost the central place and influence it enjoyed in the centuries of “Christendom,” has produced a vast mission field in the western world. In today's secular West, the Church no longer enjoys a “home court advantage.” The Church now faces the challenge of reevangelizing Europe and North America. We observe, in the United States alone, at least 120,000,000 secular people (14 or older). What do we really know about them?

To begin with the obvious, they are not a single homogeneous group, a secular population is composed of many distinct audiences—based on differences in ethnicity, culture, age, needs, education, socioeconomic class, etc. Russell Hale’s interviews with unchurched people in the United States surfaced ten distinct types of unchurched people—seven of whom are substantially secular.

Secular people vary in their consciousness of Christianity. Perhaps a third of them, like Sidney, have no christian memory; they are “agnostics”—that is, they don't know what Christians are talking about. Another third of a distant christian memory—they could identify Moses; they are “notional” Christians—who think of themselves as more or less Christian because they assume their culture is more or less Christian. Another third are “nominal” Christians—who are somewhat active in churches, but their religion is civil religion (which they mistake for Christianity) and most gospel washes past them. But all three subgroups are secular, for their lives are not significantly influenced by the christian faith.

Their assumptions, vocabularies, decision making, and life-styles reflect no Christian agenda. Furthermore, many persons in the first two groups are not “churchbroke”—that is, they don't know how to act in church. So visiting a church can be a clumsy, even alienating, experience for them. The nominal Christians are churchbroke, and they know enough of the jargon and routine to pass themselves off as disciples, but they are driven by their own will and their culture’s values.

(How to Reach Secular People by George G. Hunter III, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdom Press, 1992, 41-42, From Chapter 1, Profiling the Secular Population, Paragraph Structure Modified)