

# Commodification of Religion: World Trends

6<sup>th</sup> Lausanne Researchers  
International Conference

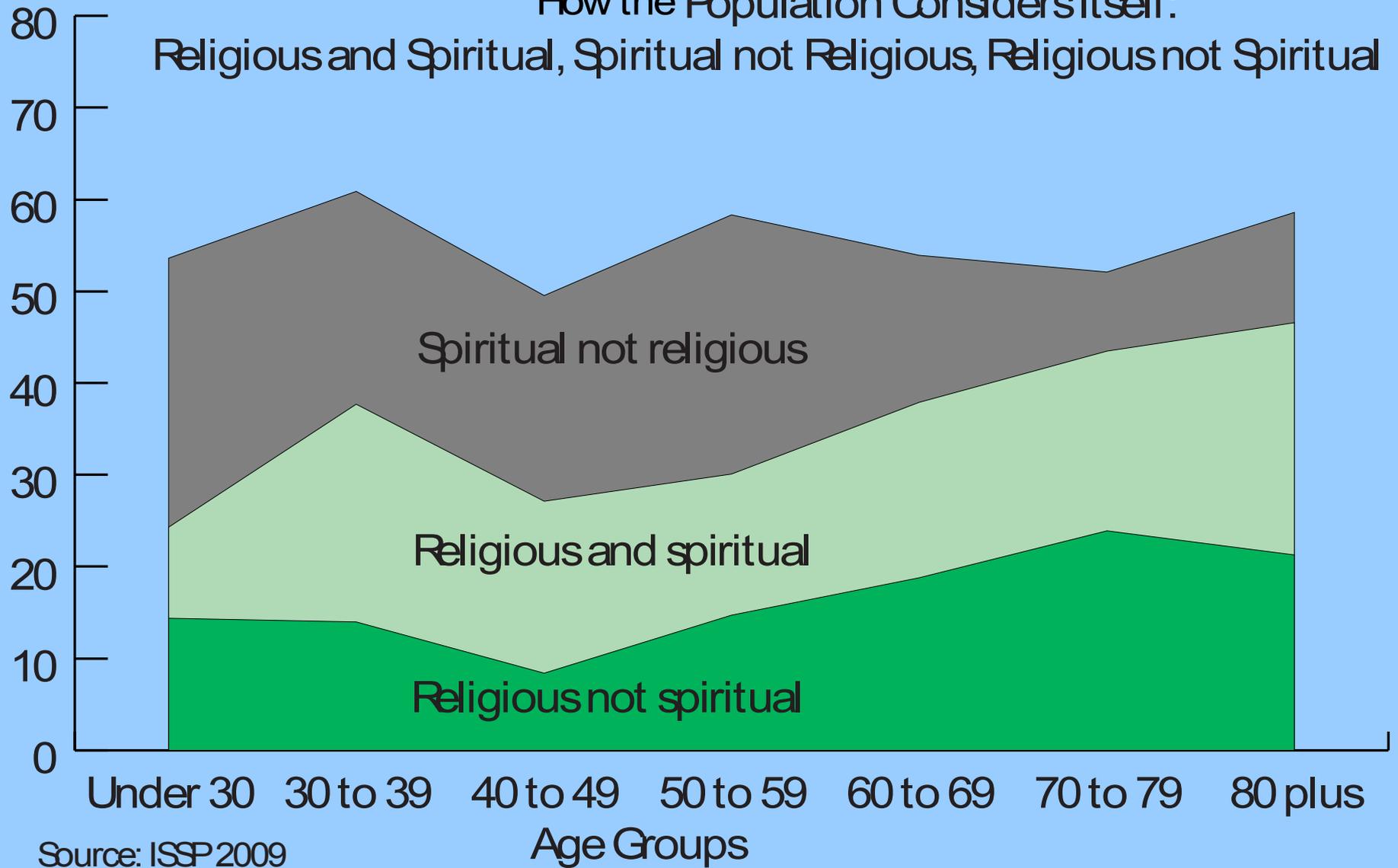
Rev Dr Philip Hughes  
Christian Research Association  
Australia

# Significant milestone in 2009 in Australia

- More Australians saw themselves as spiritual than religious:
  - 47% spiritual
  - 39% religious
  - 35% neither
- Note that 18% saw themselves as both religious and spiritual.
- To see oneself as 'spiritual' is particularly common among younger people

## How the Population Considers Itself:

Religious and Spiritual, Spiritual not Religious, Religious not Spiritual



Source: ISSP 2009

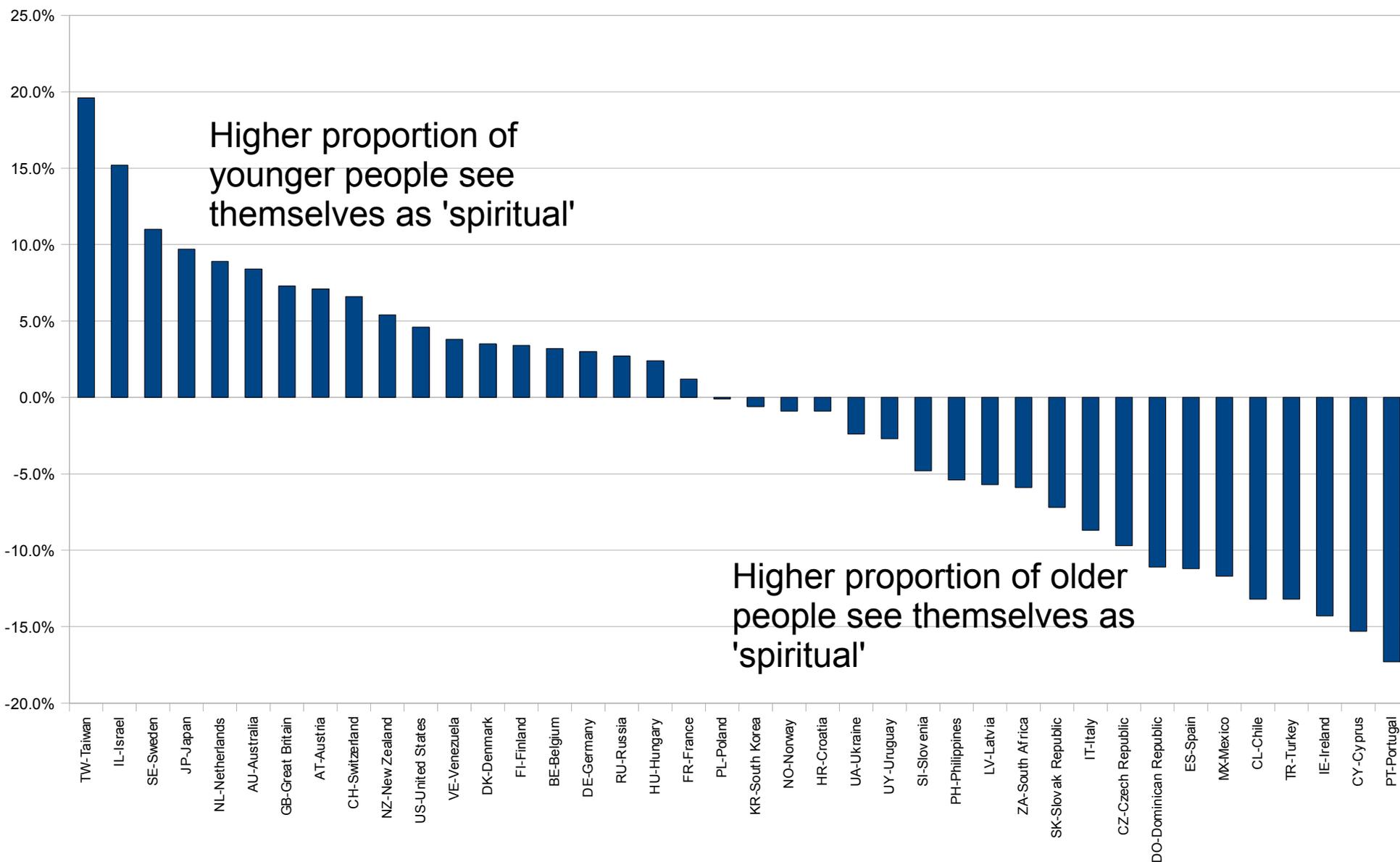
# Australian Survey Part of International Social Survey Program

- In 40 countries survey in 2008 and 2009
  - 61% saw themselves as religious
  - 44% as spiritual
  - 22% as neither.
- Just a few other countries where more spiritual than religious:
  - New Zealand
  - Japan
  - Uruguay and
  - USA (just)

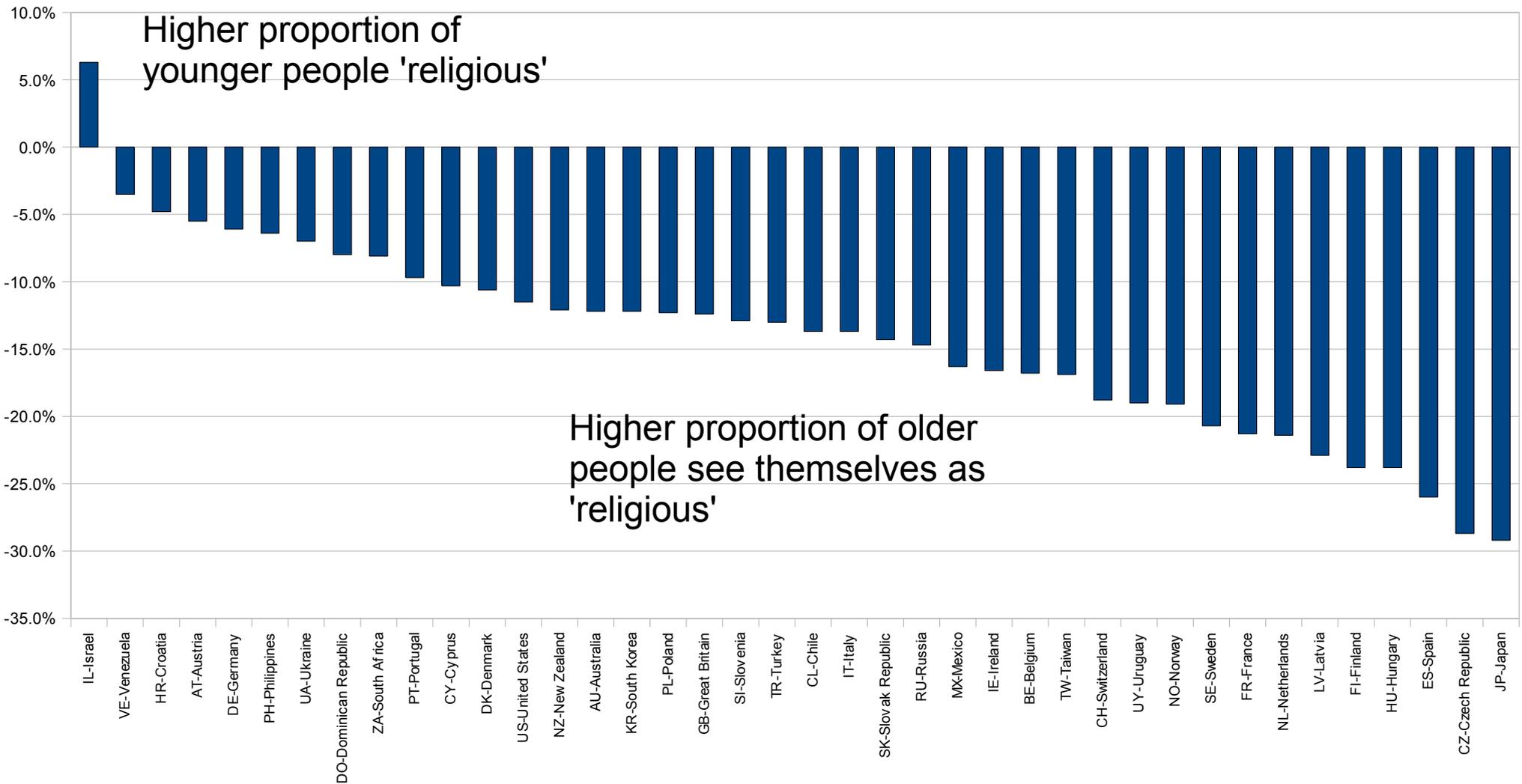
# Is 'Spirituality' a Growing Trend?

- 'Spirituality' important in many countries
  - In 11 out of 40, 50% or more described themselves as 'spiritual' and
  - In 35 out of 40, more than 30% of the population described themselves as spiritual
- See the trend by comparing how many older people (60+) versus younger people (under 60) see themselves as spiritual

# Relative Proportions of Younger and Older People Seeing Themselves as 'Spiritual'



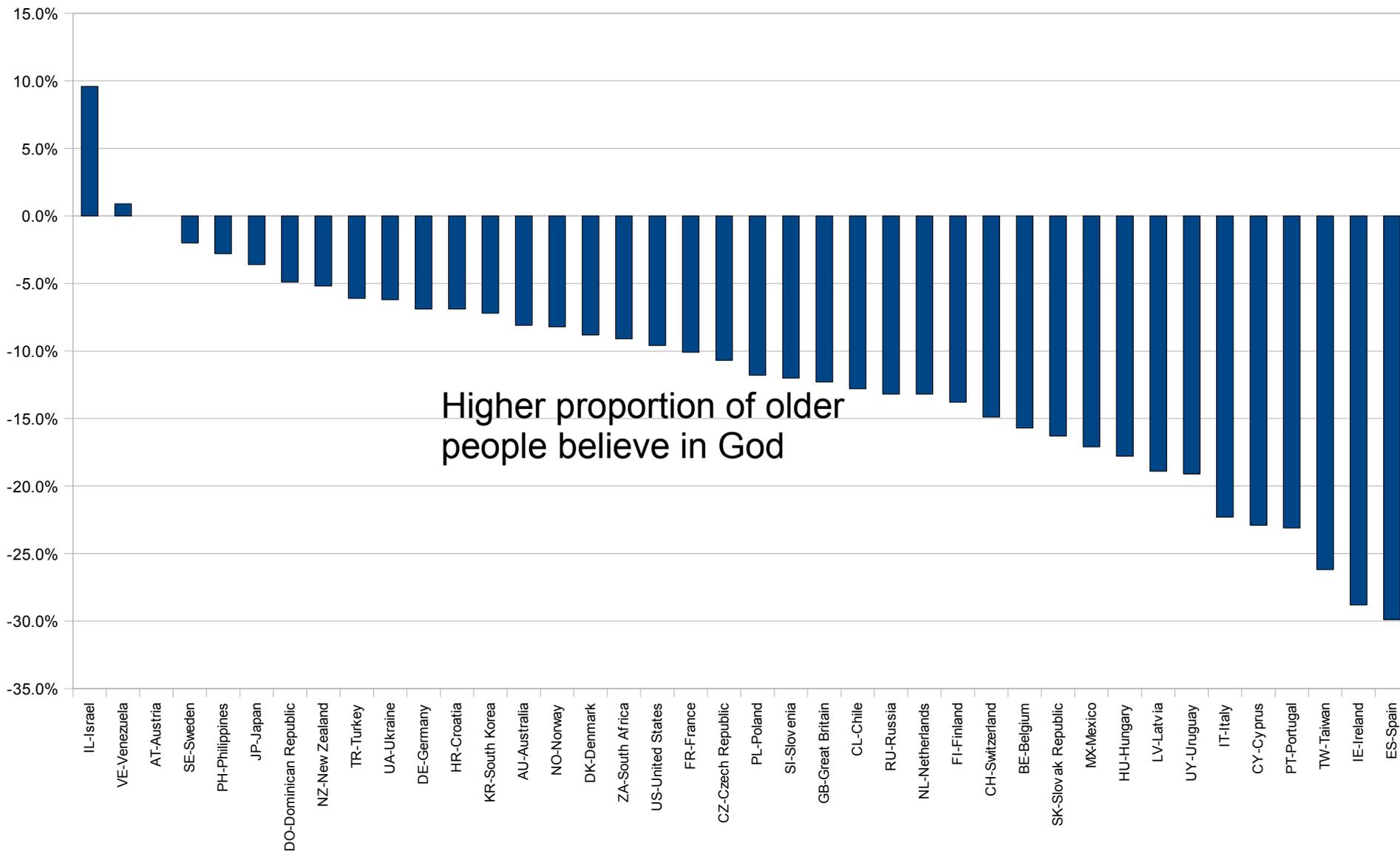
# Proportion of Young Compared with Older People seeing Themselves as 'Religious'



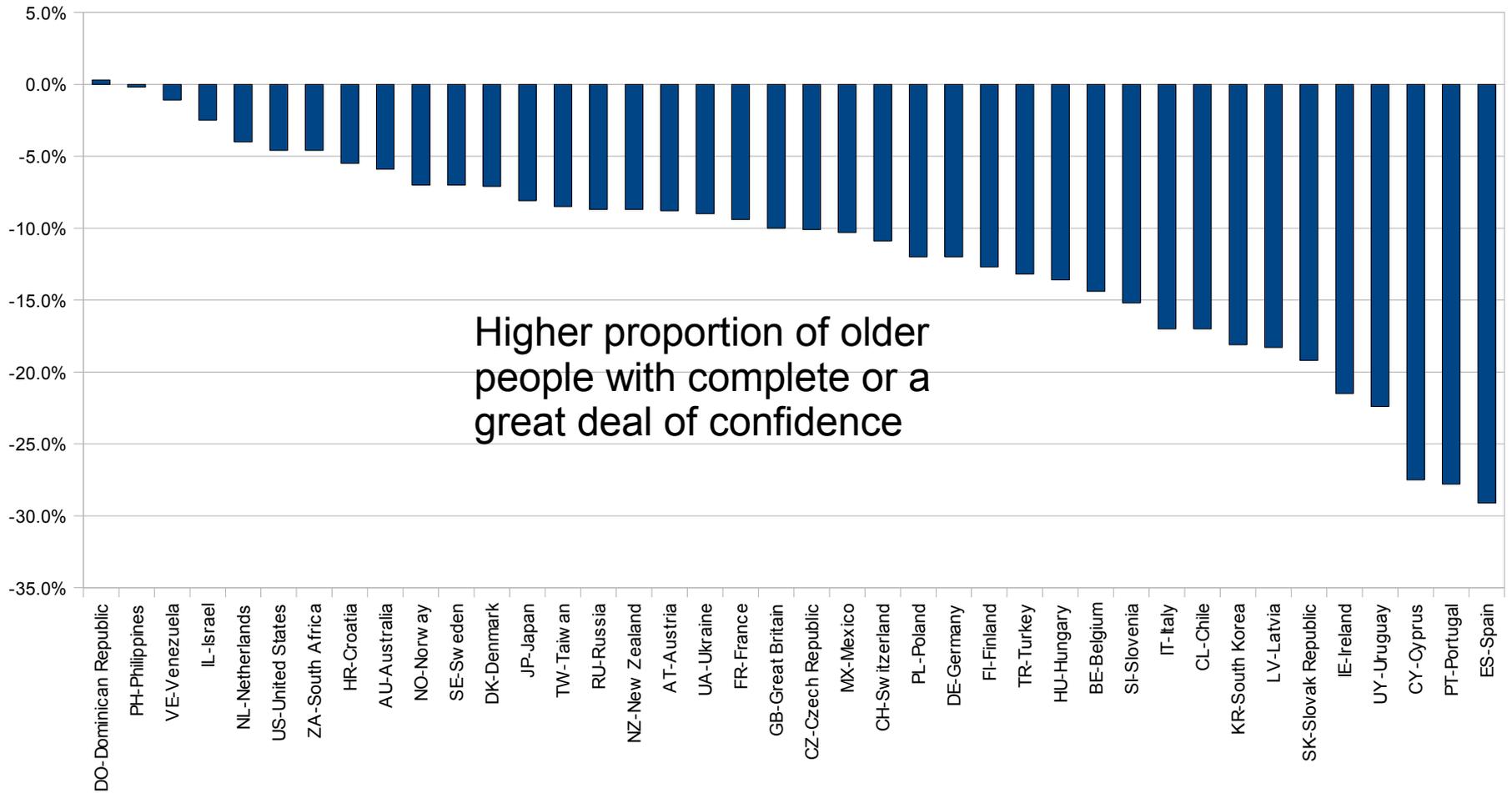
# Change in Proportion Identifying as 'Religious'

- Associated with loss of belief in God
- Decline in confidence in religious institutions
- Age factor (older people 'naturally' more religious?)

# Proportion Of Younger Compared with Older People Who Believe in God without Doubts



# Proportion of Younger Compared with Older People with Confidence in Religious Organisations



# Confidence

- Confidence levels in religious organisations is not necessarily associated with confidence in other organisations
- Around the world, younger people have higher frequency of confidence than older people in
  - 2.3% schools and education systems
  - 1.7% courts and legal systems
  - 1.1% parliament
- But 6.6% less in religious organisations

# Spirituality Compared with Religion in 'Protestant' Countries

- 'Owned' by the individual rather than the religious organisation
- Shaped by the individual
  - Often more eclectic, drawing on a range of spiritual resources
- About the 'inner being' rather than about the community or society
- Spirituality is expressed by 'buying' resources as feel one needs them (eg yoga classes)

# Carrette & King, Selling Spirituality: *The Silent Takeover of Religion*

- Take over of religion by spirituality is a 'capitalist conspiracy'
- Religion made into a commodity that can be sold and possessed by individual
- Removed ability of religion to critique capitalism by removing communal morality

'God is dead but has been resurrected as capital',  
Carrette & King.

# David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*

- Neo-Pentecostalism and evangelicalism have also embraced religion in a highly personal way
- Provided internal compass and portable identity
- Protected the nuclear family
- Withdrawn from society into voluntary religious communities
- People also buy into religious resources – eg go to church when meets their needs

'Pentecostalism can now be seen as a major narrative of modernity', David Martin

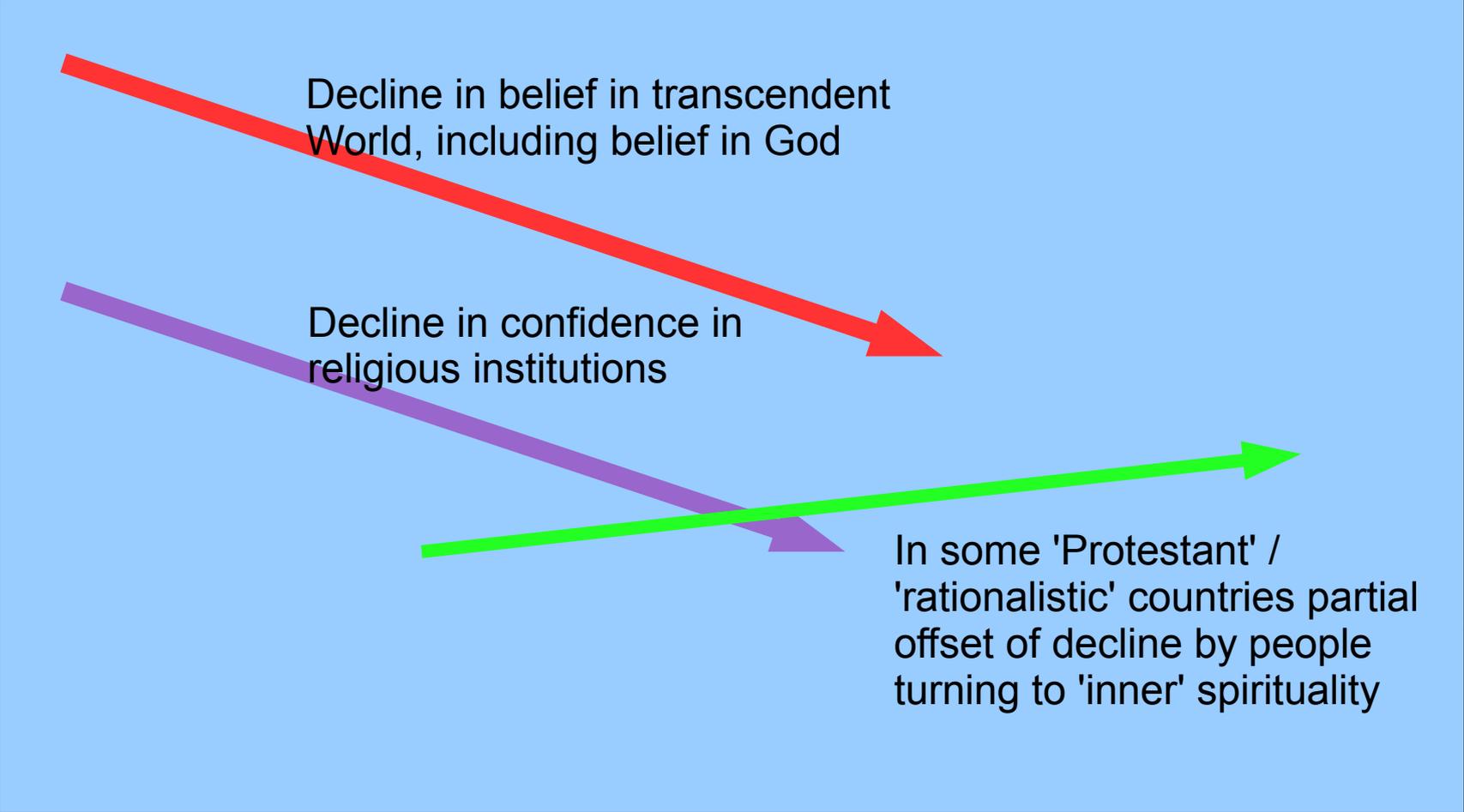
# Spirituality Seen Somewhat Different in Catholic & Orthodox Countries

- Has to do with belief in the spirit world
  - Saints, angels, evil spirits
- Folk-religion revolving around saints sometimes developed into cults and religions
  - Eg Caodism among Vietnamese
- As belief in God fades in Catholic and Orthodox world, so does this type of spirituality

# Across the 40 Countries

- Among people over 60,
  - 39% of Catholics
  - 36% of Orthodox
  - 29% of Protestants said they were spiritual and religious
- Among people under 60,
  - 26% of Orthodox
  - 31% of Catholics
  - 31% of Protestants said they were spiritual and religious

# General Trends



Decline in belief in transcendent  
World, including belief in God

Decline in confidence in  
religious institutions

In some 'Protestant' /  
'rationalistic' countries partial  
offset of decline by people  
turning to 'inner' spirituality

# In parenthesis ...

- Have done well at this conference in discussing
  - Methodologies for gathering information
  - Some facts about the contemporary situation
  - Trends in the facts
- Have not done well in explanation of facts

# Why?

- Probably happening from early childhood
- 'God' figuring less in people's account of the world and what is happening
- Less people involved in communities of faith which confirm 'God' perspectives
- Children brought up to ask 'What do I want'? To question traditions.
- Hence, see religion as choice – as much as sport that play is chosen

# Changes in Western World in Late Sixties Due to Changes in Childhood Experiences

- Smaller family sizes – partly due to availability of pill led to parents seeking to meet the needs of each individual child
  - Life revolved around what the child wanted rather than what was good for the family as a whole
- Link between contemporary forms of religiosity / spirituality and breakfast!

# Secularisation Not Everywhere

- Collapse of Communism seen interest in religion – but more among older than younger people
- China, India, Brazil not in the ISSP surveys
- Little representation of Islamic world where belief often strong
  - Turkey had highest belief in God with 98% older and 92% of younger having no doubts
- Yet, recent up-risings not predominantly Islamic

# Long-term historical perspectives show that ...

- For people to come to faith, there must be an invitation to engagement
- Most faith still comes from parents
- But change in view of the world will sometimes occur if there is some sort of personal crisis
- However, larger movements often rooted in national/international stories and sense of identity

# One Small Example

- Church in northern Thailand grew largely because of the take-over of the northern kingdom by Bangkok
- Bangkok pensioned off nobility of northern kingdom who could no longer offer patronage
- Missionaries were new patrons
- Church reached its height as percentage of population about 1911
- Growth halted by adoption of Nevus policy

# Search Institute Data on Young People

- Seen data for Australia, Thailand and UK
- Showed that young people most concerned about
  - Global warming
  - Issue of poverty / wealth
- Believe increase in worldwide concern about stability and sustainability of capitalist economic system

# Christian Faith Not Necessarily Continue to Weaken

- Will people turn to religious faith to find solutions to major human crises:
  - Poverty and unequal distribution of resources
  - Lack of water, food and energy
  - Global warming
- From a human perspective, it may be the utility of religion which provides the basis of its survival or will cause its collapse