

# Capitalizing on Spiritual Openness in a Secular Age

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Part I:  
Control and the  
Implausibility of a Secular Age

*“Imagine there’s no heaven, it’s easy if you try.  
No hell below us, above us only sky.”*

John Lennon, “Imagine” - 1971

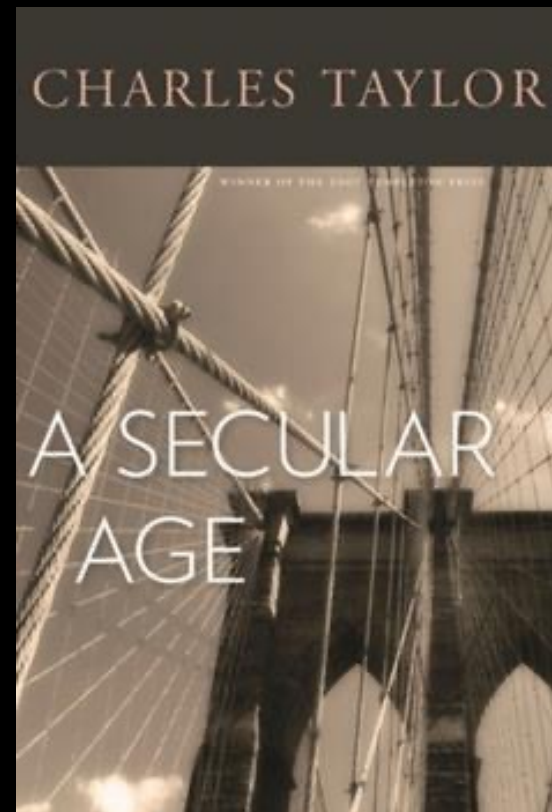
## Two Typical Meanings of “Secular”

- Privation of faith
- Decline of religious influence  
(Secular 1)
  
- Decline of religious participation
- Increased growth of alternative spiritualities  
(Secular 2)

Secular 1 & 2 = the “weather”

How did we go from a time, say 1500, when Christianity was the default identity of nearly everyone born in the North Atlantic world, to a time when Christianity (or any religion) is merely an option?

~the animating question of *A Secular Age*



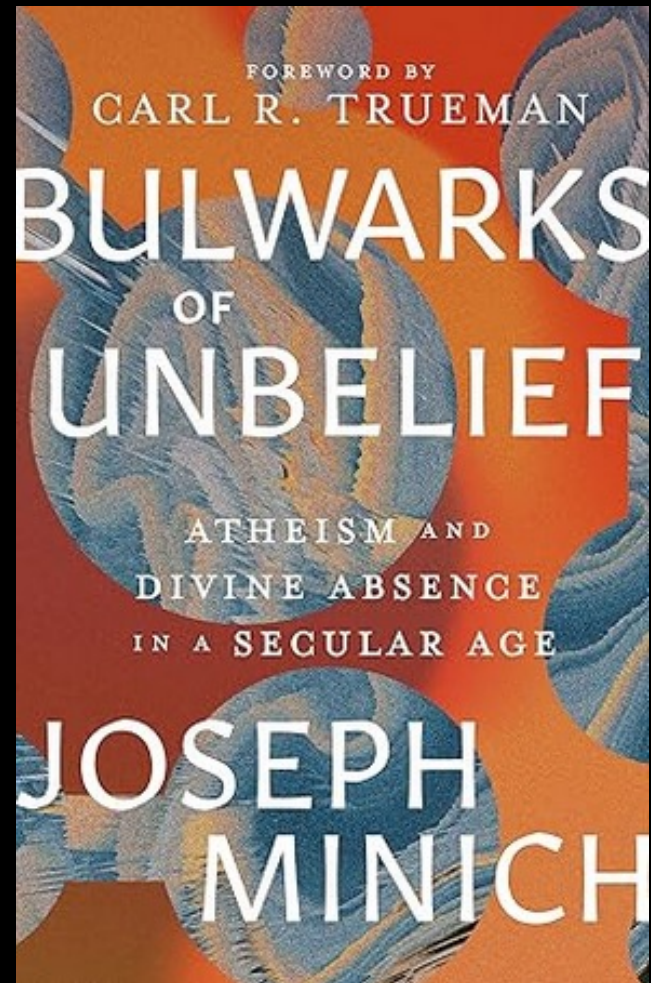
# A Secular Age is an age of *Implausibility*

Implausibility = belief is contestable, and thus contested

- We experience it as the fragility of belief
  - Believers are haunted by doubts
  - Skeptics doubt their doubts

**We are all Thomas now**

Implausibility (Secular 3) = the “climate”



FOREWORD BY

CARL R. TRUEMAN

BULWARKS  
OF  
UNBELIEF

ATHEISM AND  
DIVINE ABSENCE  
IN A SECULAR AGE

JOSEPH  
MINICH

The *feeling* of divine absence

“You know, God could totally get rid of atheism if he’d just show up. I mean, think of it. How hard would it be for the Almighty to peel back the clouds every day at 3pm for ‘God time’ and say, ‘Hey guys. Here I am. See ya.’ If he did that? No atheism. So why doesn’t he if we’re supposed to believe in him?”

~teenage interviewee, NPR

Control



Example: Fortified City, Khirbet Qeiyafa

# Control *via* Technology

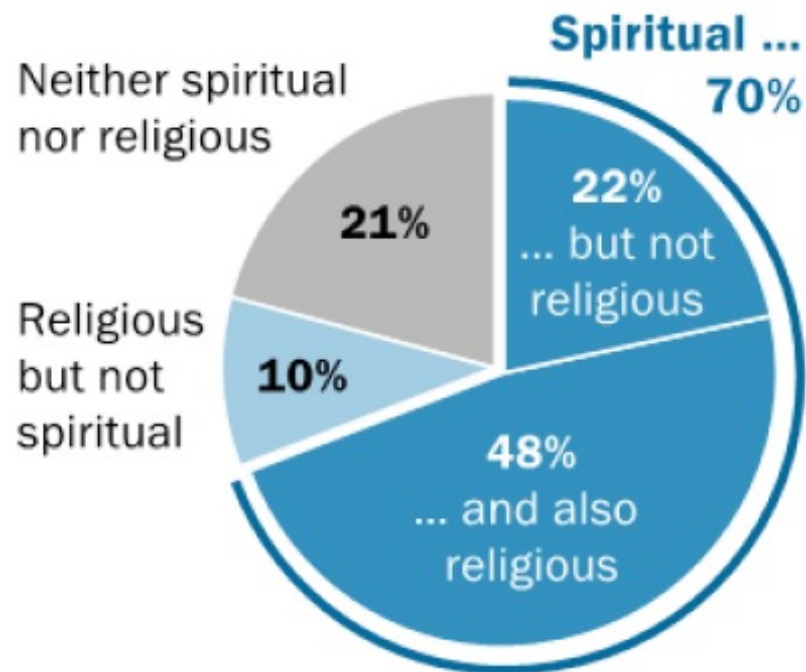
*Control* diminishes the need for God

Ministry *as* waiting for God to show up, to act

Absence as an *openness* to presence

## 22% of Americans are spiritual but not religious

*% of U.S. adults who are \_\_\_\_\_*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 31-Aug. 6, 2023.

"Spirituality Among Americans"

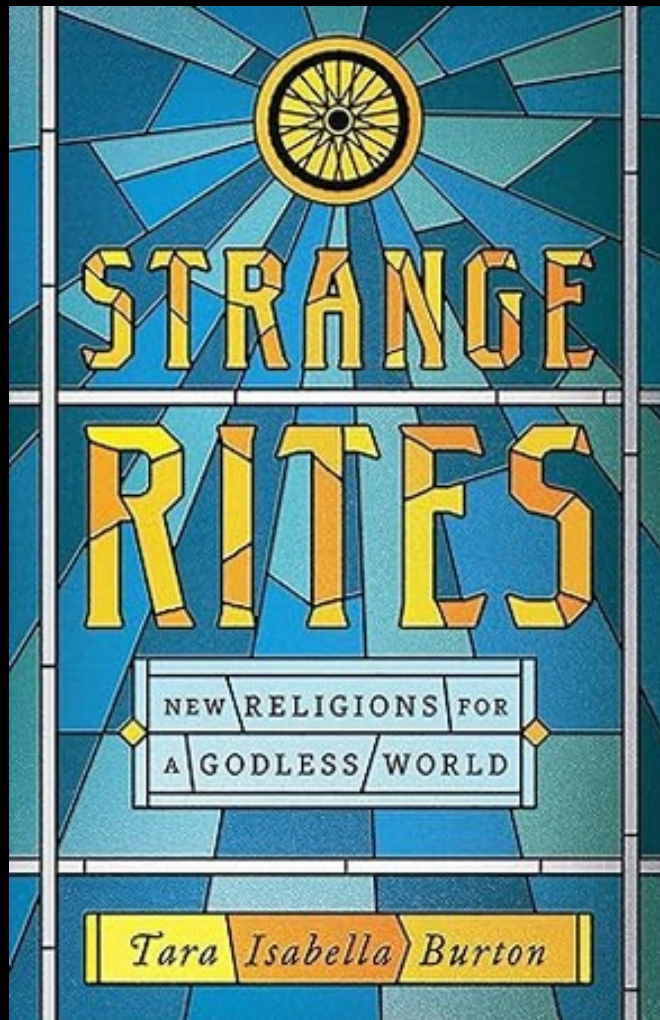
**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

A person is silhouetted against a teal background, standing on a large, faint cross. The person is positioned at the center of the cross's horizontal bar.

# nonverts

THE MAKING OF  
EX-CHRISTIAN  
AMERICA

Stephen Bullivant



STRANGE

RITES

NEW RELIGIONS FOR  
A GODLESS WORLD

*Tara Isabella Burton*

The openness of a pluralistic culture is an  
*opportunity*, not a threat

*But often, in the world's most crowded streets,*

*But often, in the din of strife*

*There rises an unspeakable desire*

*After a knowledge of our buried life;*

*A thirst to spend our fire and restless force*

*In tracking out our true, original course;*

*A longing to enquire*

*Into the mystery of this heart which beats*

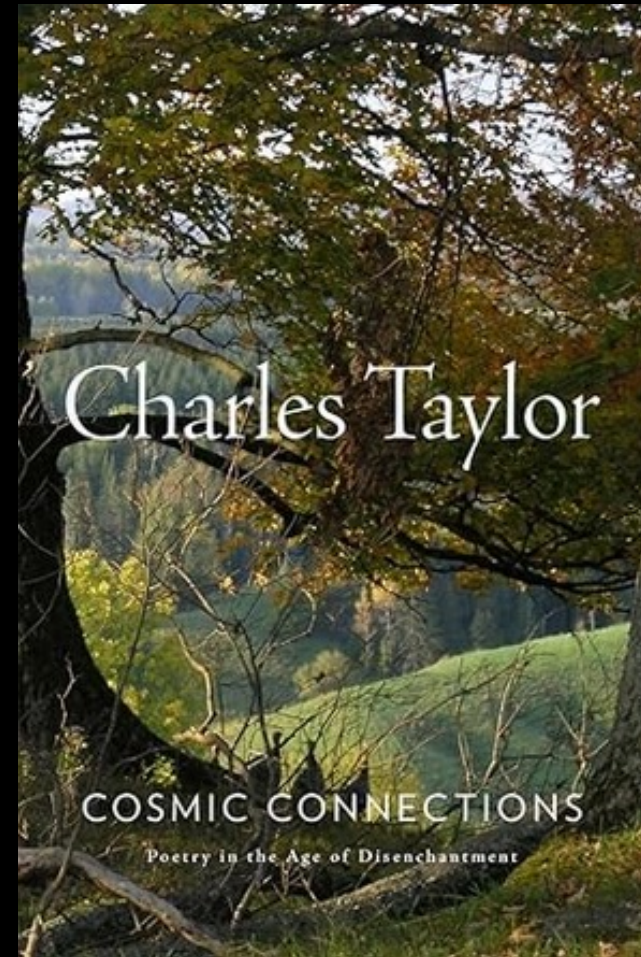
*So wild, so deep in us—to know*

*Whence our lives come and where they go.*

**The Buried Life**  
Matthew Arnold

Identity is constituted by  
“my fundamental  
commitments, the  
landmarks in my moral  
horizon which guide me in  
my important choices, be  
these my religion, or  
national identity, or my  
sexual orientation, or my  
vocation, and so on.”

(Charles Taylor,  
*Cosmic Connections*, 528)



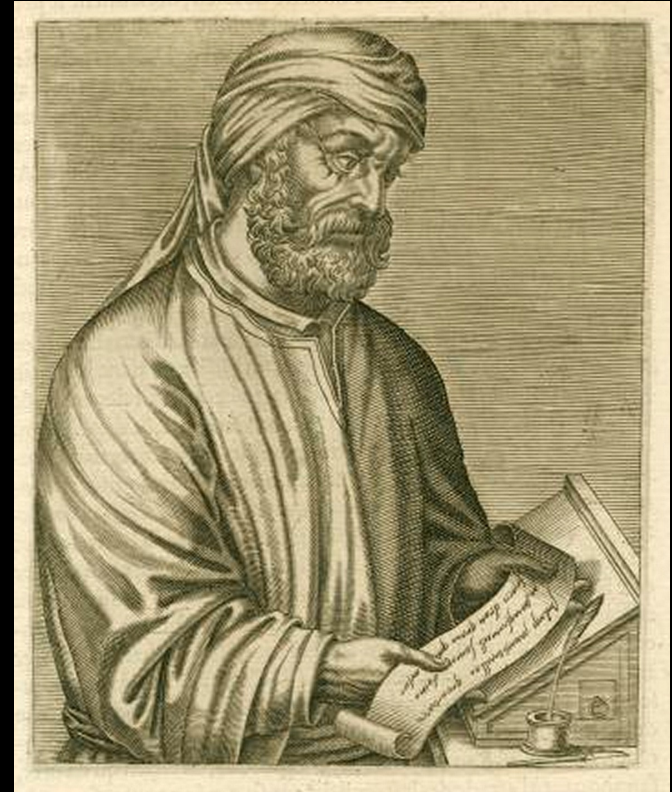


The fellowship that is affected by the sacrament “consists in this, that all the spiritual possessions of Christ and his saints are shared with and become the common property of him who receives this sacrament...[it] is like a city where every citizen shares with all the others the city’s name, honor, freedom, trade, customs, usages, help, support, protection, and the like, while at the same time he shares all the dangers of fire and flood, enemies and death, losses, taxes, and the like.” (*LW* 35:51)

No nostalgic return, but a *leaning back* on ancient wisdom as God draws us into His good future

We *are* before the eyes of the  
watching world *who we have been*  
before the watching world

“It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. *See how they love one another*, they say, for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, they say, for they themselves will sooner put to death” (Tertullian, *The Apology*, ch. 39).





<https://www.newyorker.com/cartoon/a15905>

*“Your mother and I are separating because  
I want what’s best for the ~~country~~ (CHURCH) and your mother doesn’t.”*

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.  
(1 Peter 3.13-17)

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Colossian 4.5-6)

Part II:  
Resonance and the Gospel

“With the grain of the Universe”

~Stanley Hauerwas



RESONANCE

1. Affected

# RESONANCE



1. Affected

2. Self-Efficacy  
(Emotional Response)

# RESONANCE



1. Affected

2. Self-Efficacy  
(Emotional Response)

3. Transformation

# RESONANCE



1. Affected

2. Self-Efficacy  
(Emotional Response)

3. Transformation

4. Uncontrollability

Paralyzation because of so many choices

Freedom of choice *as* a new kind of bondage

“We do what we want, and that’s just the problem.”

~Gerhard Forde

We have the goods in the Good News!

Let's give it away.

# Q & A

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