



The majority of young people when asked to designate their religious affiliation are now checking “none of the above”. This seems to be creating considerable panic in the headquarters of religious institutions. And it should. Official denominational organizations have had many centuries to get their act together and they have basically messed it up. As far as those professing to follow the path that Jesus laid out they too often, as Karl Rahner once observed, “profess him with their mouths and deny him with their

actions and this is what an unbelieving world finds unbelievable.”

So where does this leave us? Are the coming generations going to be guided by nothing more than self-centered preoccupation? Will concerns for the common good completely vanish? I don't think so. I recently had the assistance of a very bright twenty-something who would have considered herself totally free of organized religious influence. When I mentioned that I thought in a particular essay directed to people her age it would be wise for me to stay clear of the subject of beliefs she strongly objected. “Working on beliefs is what my generation should be doing!” I realized she was expressing exactly the same attitude a hero of mine from my own generation, Hans Küng, wrote in his book *What I Believe*;

How can I accept my own self with all its shadow sides? How do I accept my own freedom that is also open to evil? How can I affirm meaning in my life despite all the meaninglessness? How can I say YES to the reality of the world and humankind as it is in its enigmatic and contradictory nature?

Why wrestle with these issues? For both my young friend and 85 year-old Hans Küng this is all part of the quest of finding trust and joy in life. I think one of the great mistakes of religious institutions has been their mistrust of life and people.

This may be an important time for extracting the very best in the long spiritual heritage that is at our disposal. The process is taking place in the daily lives of ordinary people as they search for the best way to meet the challenges of these times.

Recently as I walk around our farm I discover little patches of tall wild oats. What is so remarkable? They're not supposed to be here. In the 19th century they covered this county. A friend tells me that a farmer coming from Missouri wrote in his diary “that the wild oats grew tall enough to hide a man on horseback.” Then came decades of clearing the land for farms, cities, roads, vineyards, resorts and all the rest that the civilized world brought with it. The wild oats were gone. But they aren't.

Millions of good people have lived their lives the best they could. And, like the wild oats, they have left seeds in our seemingly barren and meaningless spiritual landscape. But just like the wild oats those seeds can sprout and grow again in the darndest places.

I think that is happening now. Those sprouts, and the “nones” who frequently are the first to find them, are very valuable to our unfolding future. I don't know how much of that I will live to see but I find it exciting to contemplate!

Brother Toby