

are we just learning to be nice

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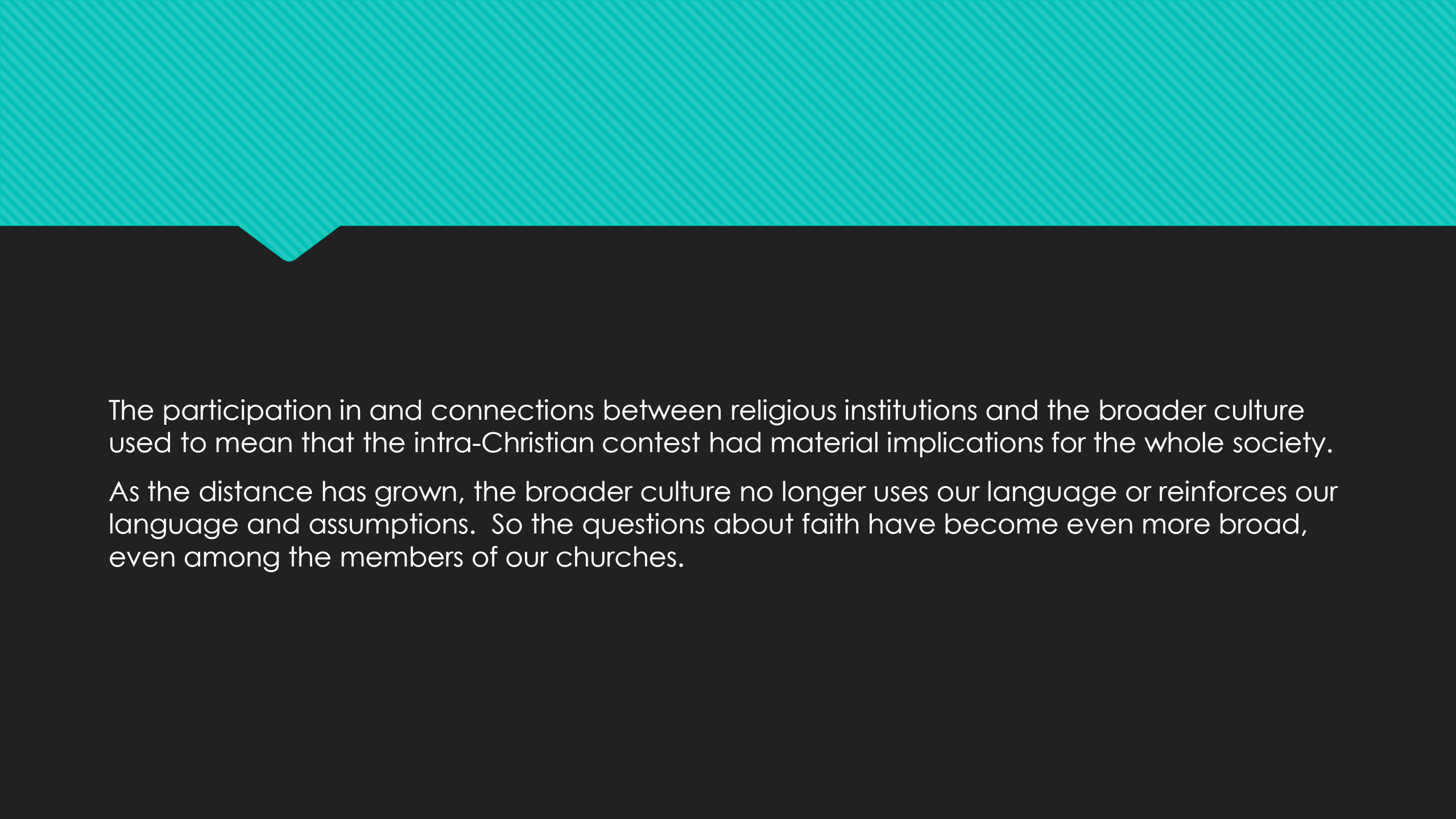
- 15 youth regulars
- Caucasian
- Children of “professionals”
- Baptized and Confirmed
- “I’m not a ‘Christian’”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umLUKBlpyoY>

General Shape of American Christianity post 1950

- Widening gap between Mainline and “Evangelical” Christianity
 - I HATE this distinction... but I’ll use it anyway
- Different epistemologies
- Different definitions and requirements
- “What’s it take to be a Christian?”
- “Who gets to decide?”
- The “volume” exchange

Death of the “Christian Century”

- Result of the “volume exchange”?
- Who is defining Christian faith in the media?
- How is it being talked about?
- Where is it being discussed?
- “Where do you go to church?”
 - Or my experience “Where is your church home”
- Becomes “Are you a church person?”
- Grows to an assumption that you are not

The image features a teal background with a black geometric shape at the bottom. The shape consists of a horizontal line, a downward-pointing triangle, and an upward-pointing triangle, creating a jagged edge. The text is white and positioned in the lower half of the image.

The participation in and connections between religious institutions and the broader culture used to mean that the intra-Christian contest had material implications for the whole society.

As the distance has grown, the broader culture no longer uses our language or reinforces our language and assumptions. So the questions about faith have become even more broad, even among the members of our churches.

- Fewer folks attend
- Less often
- Increased Competition
- Rise of “Spiritual but not Religious”
- Nones and Dones
- Seems more pronounced with each successive generation
 - My background they called it “falling away”
 - In Mainline communities, I sometimes think we just call it confirmation...

The Mainline Response

- Decreasing our volume
- Decreasing the depth of our claims
- Entertaining programs to keep kids involved

Why the Church?

- Are we trying to facilitate, engage, mediate, or invite a transcendent experience of the living God... or are we trying to learn to be nice?

The “Into the Woods” principle

“And I know things now many valuable things that I hadn't known before. Do not put your faith in a cape and a hood, they will not protect you the way that they should and take extra care with strangers even flowers have their dangers and though scary is exciting

Nice is different than good.

Now I know don't be scared, Granny is right, “Just be prepared”. Isn't it nice to know a lot?
And a little bit not”

If that is depressing...

- This is the best time in history to be the Church
 - Expressions of Christian faith remain safe to make
 - As broader culture retreats from Christian assumptions, the church is free to reclaim its identity
- In the collusion with broader culture, it was the *culture* that was dominant, not the Christian faith
- The “Christian Century” wasn’t particularly “Christian”

Why are YOU here?

Congregations and Spiritual praxis

- What makes us weird?
 - Talk about it
- Jesus matters
- Church is not an “activity”
 - Christian faith is an identity
- A return to Christian Disciplines
- Christian morality is an outgrowth of Spiritual formation

- Focus on adult faith formation
 - The 18 year old (or 23 year old) fallacy
 - We don't suddenly become passive learners at the age of 18
 - Each of us is a Spiritual Giant and Imposter
 - Prayer
 - Scripture
 - Generosity
 - Testimony
 - Service

- Embodiment practices
- “Mountaintop” experiences for every stage of life
- 7 Marks
 - www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/TFE_Complete-Manual-Vital-Congregations.pdf
- Be intentional about everything we do and what we want folks to experience
 - If inviting the Spirit is our goal, that must be at the forefront
 - Speaking of church experiences...

... Worship

- I love Reformed worship, AND we need to think as we design it:
- What is each move of the service intended to communicate and what is it that people are supposed to experience?
- Are we telling people 'why'?
- Are we willing to change if we aren't accomplishing what we intend?

- The service of Christian worship *MUST* become the first site of Christian education and formation

Particularly for children and youth

- “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses”
 - Mentor and Model
 - 5:1 ratio – 5 ADULTS to every child/youth
- “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words”?
 - Use words
- When they are at their worst, be at our best
 - Adolescents are asking every question of identity
- Engage and Include
 - From reading, teaching, leading, singing, studying, giving. All Christian expressions are appropriate for children
- Always, always, always, authenticity
 - All positions, views, processes, practices, theologies, interpretations, beliefs, are provisional
 - Begin with: “What is giving you life today?”

Where will the Spirit take you?

Questions?

To the table of Jesus Christ

- The invitation
- The story of Salvation
- The Call to the Spirit
- The words of institution
- The Communion of the People
- Our Prayer of commitment
- Our sending

**A reminder... this is all
provisional**

and I'm just some guy