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YOUTH MINISTRY IN A WORLD OF DIVERSITY

THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH
PROJECT ON YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

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Abstract:

The research project came about at the suggestion of Nick Shepherd and was intended to source articles from IASYM members from around the world to outline the issues surrounding youth spirituality today. The articles presented for publication included two each from Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom and a very valuable contribution from an African perspective.

An integrated analysis of this range of papers is a complex exercise. An overwhelming conclusion that can be reached from the articles is that the Christian message is in some danger of becoming extinct in the U.K. and Australia. Whilst there remains a more overt religious expression among United States youth, contributors also recognise the need to change the way we minister to the young in that country if we are to pass on the message of Christ. Similar problems are echoed in a different way, and in a different cultural context, in the contribution on African youth.

This paper will utilise Inayatullah's causal layered analysis (CLA) framework to examine the way in which the world view of the young people impacts on how we present the reality of the Christian message. It will take the view that the metaphors and myths of Christianity, while essentially unchangeable, need to be reinterpreted and represented in a context appropriate to each of the youth cultures presented by the writers. It will examine briefly and comment upon the challenges this poses for youth ministry in each of the contexts presented.

The research project was intended to bring together the research of youth ministers of differing faith groups from around the world. In one way it has achieved this aim, with significant contributions from Australia, the United States and the U.K., with the backgrounds of contributors ranging from evangelical protestant to anglo-Catholic and mainstream Catholic.

However, the lack of a voice, of whatever faith background, from the developing world is significant. Only Saneta Maiko^[1] wrote from this background, albeit from his position as a student in the United States. He tried to bring to our attention the particular issues of African youth with regard to their Christian faith. His paper, unfortunately not able to be published, was in stark contrast to the others. He was not lamenting a lack of faith among the young but in fact counselling youth ministers how to work effectively in further developing an already strong foundation in faith.

Perhaps this highlights Berger's^[2] suggestion that secularism and an overwhelming deference to individual choice are a peculiarly western phenomenon. Berger sees the majority of the world's population as quite different to the west. He perceives a clear reaction against religious belief being

challenged and derided by our western society and our moral pluralism. Something as fundamental to humanity as religious belief, the myths and stories that explain life's origins and meanings and give a purpose to daily life provokes a reactionary response in many parts of the world when challenged by western secularism. In the very significant populations outside of Europe and the English speaking developed countries, religion, Berger believes, is at least resurgent if indeed it has ever been in decline. So in the majority of the world the challenge for youth ministry is surely still to provide spiritual support and guidance, but to a vastly different audience. Whether this difference will remain is another issue and I will address that to some extent towards the end of the paper.

Australia contributed two research projects. Tyson[3], whose work I will expand upon later, challenges his evangelical church to examine what youth ministry targets and what it rejects or avoids. In his opinion, his evangelical church may be in danger of welcoming only certain types of young people. He questions his church and asks whether this is the result of a particular theological or cultural approach. Perhaps we all run the risk of being ossified in a particular tradition and unable to adapt to a changing world and a changing youth.

My own contribution with Eric Marx[4] took a more quantitative view of youth spirituality by means of a survey of Catholic high school students. While not a true longitudinal study, the two samples were taken four years apart in very similar types of Catholic high schools. While the samples are small and hence any conclusions must be nuanced, the potential conclusions are somewhat alarming. We wonder if the capacity to recognise and express spirituality by way of interpreting the experience of life in a spiritual way, is slowly being lost. Hay[5], to whom I will refer later in the paper, believes that the capacity to relate to the spiritual, what he terms "relational consciousness", is being steadily eroded in today's world. Our results seem to indicate that this could be so amongst today's young people.

The two papers from the U.K. are really one piece of research. Baxter-Brown[6] takes one interview of an extensive piece of research by Rankin[7] and expands upon it by reflecting on the complex social world to which his respondent, Suzi, relates. The story itself is not in the Rankin paper but is taken from the more extensive book[8] he wrote about his work.

Rankin in turn attempts to summarise three years of work interviewing young people and a short book on the results into a conference paper. I will refer to his work and its significance later in the paper. It was always an impossible task, but one well worth both his effort as author and others as youth ministers in reading the result. It is an important work but the book itself and its conclusions are probably a more important resource for those in the field of youth ministry.

Wilkinson's[9] paper from the U.S. is again a quantitative piece sourced from a survey of young people on the streets in Ocean City, New Jersey. His conclusion, that few young people identify a "spiritual experience" in their lives, is both at odds with but in some ways consistent with, the results of Marx and I in Australia. We found a much higher incidence of reporting but expressed a concern about a significant decrease in its level. Perhaps Wilkinson's most telling insight is his identification of the role of parents in transmitting faith and the negative image of Jesus that this may have helped to create in the young people he surveyed.

Myers[10] picks up on this crisis of faith in adolescence. While he recognises its existence he has a more optimistic approach, believing in a God who "enters the lives of teens in order to suffer with them through the struggle of identity formation". However, he challenges the Christian churches about the images of God they present. He believes these are simply not relating to young people and have the potential to turn them towards unbelief.

So in expanding upon the project I believe we can only start from where we are. In summary, the task is to draw together the strands of the significant contributions of youth ministers in a secular western society as they attempt to work with young people who are mostly alienated from the various churches they represent.

This paper will first highlight some of the common and recurring themes among youth ministers working in our western society. Secondly, it will drill a little beneath the presenting issues, aiming to augment some of the quite deep analysis already in the papers. Finally, in what could be its most controversial section, it will suggest some future directions that might be taken up by those challenged to minister to youth.

THE GOD WHO WON'T GO AWAY

The very existence of the international project on youth spirituality implies that surely at least those working in youth ministry believe that young people are spiritual. Otherwise, if our writers were not researching and writing about something they believe exists, then they would have been exploring the uncharted

depths of whether there really is such a thing as “youth spirituality”. None chose to do this. All began, as I see it, from a clear belief in the fundamentally spiritual nature of humanity, and hence of youth.



Tyson writes of his broad experience of young people while chaplain at a large Australian high school. He suggests that there is no single youth spirituality but indeed a complicated spectrum of spiritualities. However, Tyson admits that the mainstream, the vast majority of young people with whom he worked, can be characterised as being comfortable within a consumer society based on individualism. He labels this group the 'hyper modern' and admits that their spirituality is largely unexpressed, and where it is expressed, it is certainly not expressed in formal religion.

From this large and somewhat diverse group at the centre he sees the far right as being a very small minority of fundamentalist church-goers comfortable with the church as it is. Wilkinson's work in the U.S. suggests that this is probably due to parental influence as does the extensive work of Flynn[11] and more recently Mason, Weber, Singleton and Hughes[12] in Australia. While the existence of a fundamentalist and loyal group may give some youth ministers comfort, the longevity of their unquestioning commitment could be an issue if parental influence is indeed the driving force. Hughes[13] supports this view, suggesting that churches must work with whole family units in faith development rather than with individuals otherwise their work may not have longevity. At any rate, those working with this group of young people are not working with large numbers, so such work may not provide a 'solution' for churches if 'solutions' are defined by increased numbers.

To the far left of centre, according to Tyson, are the radical post secular groups. He suggests that these groups have the capacity to re-invent or dramatically change Christian spirituality. However, the changes may not be attractive to all of us since this group do not accept the starting points of an older generation. They demand that the church live what it preaches and they don't see that it is doing so. Until that happens churches will struggle to reach out to this group.

All of this poses the question, what is the starting point for youth ministers? Why do we do what we do? Before addressing that question specifically, I will suggest that, whatever our underlying purpose, we are addressing an area of basic human need by working in the field of spirituality. However, the definition of spirituality itself proves elusive, since there is no universally accepted definition of “spirituality”, and many of the writers in the research project assumed its existence without attempting to define the reality.

Myers and Wilkinson assume it has a great deal to do with God and a belief in Jesus, which at least in the public forum in the U.S. would appear to be the case. The U.S. is one of few countries, apart from perhaps fundamentalist Islamic regimes, where the President can publicly invoke God in support of his country. America publicly trusts in the Almighty. The fact that various countries may have differing interpretations of what this almighty allegiance might mean they prefer not to explore.

Philip Rankin interviewed hundreds of young people over a period of three years in the U.K. He approached groups, and only approached those who had some “ownership” of their space. That is they had been sitting in a park, or in a pub, and had settled down there. He asked them if they were prepared to answer a very simple first question, “Would you perceive yourself to be spiritual?” then invited further conversation by asking “What do you think the word spiritual means?”

Over many groups in places all over northern England, his request never met with refusal. They were certainly willing to talk, often at length, once given the opportunity. Yet, in the context of seeking to define this elusive concept, spirituality, Rankin’s^[14] work appears to search for the spirituality of youth by allowing his respondents to define it.

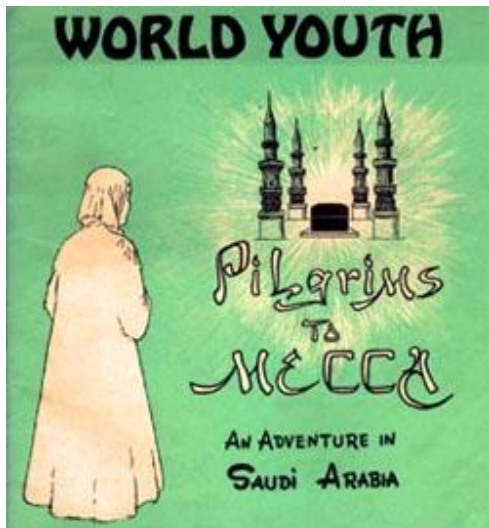
My own preference, and one I will follow in this paper, is to use Rolheiser's[15] approach, namely that our spirituality is our response to life. In other words, every human being on this earth has a spirituality, like it or not and recognise it or not. O'Murchu[16] is clear that human beings are spiritual people and have always expressed this through a worship that recognised a power or force beyond their every day existence. They did this, in the well documented case of Australian Aborigines for instance, for tens of thousands of years before the Christian era. Christianity, with a little over two thousand years of history, is a relative latecomer in presenting a set of myths and metaphors, woven within the life and reality of Jesus, that provide a way to understand the reality of our existence. Rolheiser defines our spirituality as providing for each individual a sense of who we are, our story or personal history and our hopes for the future. I will use that definition for the remainder of this paper.

Understanding spirituality in this way will, I hope, go some way towards addressing Myer's question in his excellent paper: "Is the God we present big enough?" Both Rankin and Hughes, among others, would answer "No", not if we are going to touch most young people. As O'Murchu says, mapping the reality of the human condition through Jesus and his teaching is only one of many lenses through which human beings might look. We, those who work with young people, may be followers of Jesus, so of course we should use that lens, both in our own search and in helping that of others, but we have got to recognise that others may not choose to do so. We could then be challenged by the alternative spiritualities that young people and others embrace in their search.

Rankin's very significant work with young people in the U.K. highlights this dilemma. He concludes, as many in youth ministry have no doubt experienced, that young people are happy to mix Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, yoga, tree-hugging, candles, and new age ideas together and switch from one to the other quite readily. They seem ready to explore while less ready to use only one framework or indeed to be constrained by framework at all. Certainly, the

message of Jesus and the traditions of Christianity could provide a coherent language that can draw all of this together. But Rankin is cautious about approaching this spiritual hunger via a religious framework. Many young people associate the term 'spirituality' strongly with religion and religion has negative connotations for them. Rankin suggests that this negative connection may eventually lead to difficulty in the future with even introducing a conversation about spirituality. He suggests it may in time produce a negative response. If we can't readily discuss "spirituality" then we would be forced to begin our youth contact even one step further back from the Christian message.

Relational Consciousness – a Foundational Condition



Religion has survived throughout human existence precisely because there is something about it that has survival value for our species. The capacity to be religious, or perhaps better, to express our understanding that we are only a small part of a large reality **and that this reality has meaning**, is hard-wired into human consciousness. So runs Hardy's[17] hypothesis which, in more recent times appears to have been confirmed from a number of perspectives. Not least of these are the studies of the brain scientists, Ramachandran[18], Newberg and D'Aquili[19] and Albright and Ashbrook[20] for instance, who confirm that human consciousness has a profound capacity for what we might term 'religious experience'. Hay would say this is better expressed as our capacity for experiences that some might interpret as being 'religious'. The functioning of the human brain confirms that these experiences are a natural reality within human consciousness. Ramachandran notes that the existence of this capacity is neither an argument for nor against the existence of

God. It is simply recognition of the human capacity for experiences that transcend the everyday.

Such experiences were a reality for the early Christians. Johnson[21] believes strongly that much of the New Testament reflects a profound encounter of the writers with something real and powerful that imposes itself on them. They refer to both the spirit and to evil spirits in this way. For Johnson a religious experience is a “response to that which is perceived as ultimate, involving the whole person, characterised by a peculiar intensity, and issuing in action.” (p. 60) So the path to evangelisation of the young could sound relatively straightforward. Could we not help them to understand Jesus by helping them recognise their own first hand experiences?

The simple answer is ‘yes’ but unfortunately there is more to it than that. As a researcher in religious experiences of young people and religious educator, I would appreciate very much if it were that simple. However, the human capacity for transcendent experience does not mean such experiences happen often nor that they are recognised.

The international researchers are a little contradictory on this point. Rankin does identify some level of ‘experience’ among young people but does not elaborate. Baxter-Brown[22] does so and outlines one very profound experience for Suzi[23] that follows Johnson’s definition almost to the letter. Wilkinson, however, finds quite a low level of religious experience among his respondents and my own research among small groups indicates a falling level of recognition of these experiences. Wilkinson associates his survey very strongly with ‘religion’ and I suspect negativity towards formal church has influenced his respondents, since the questions about formal religion were asked before those on experience. I record a much higher positive response rate than Wilkinson, albeit significantly lower than my own work four years previously, but it could also have done so in my own work[24]. Although I avoid questions on formal religion as much as

possible, all of my respondents were in church schools, so the context of religion was all pervasive and indeed may have biased the results, given an increasing negativity towards 'religion'.

The pathway to religion via experience does seem fraught with some difficulty, given that researchers do not seem to agree on its intensity or even reality among many young people. It is even more so when we take into account Hay's[25] suggestion that the very foundation of human beings' capacity for such experiences, a capacity Hay and Nye[26] call "relational consciousness" is being increasingly muted by a secular society based on the cult of individual choice.

'Relational Consciousness' is the capacity to relate to our day to day experiences in a meaningful way. First, to be aware of who I am. To experience the reality of my own unique being, my feelings, fears and the wonderful complexity that is me. Second to be able to relate to people. The capacity to be aware of the needs of other individuals, to recognise and appreciate their understandings, perhaps different to my own, but at least never identical. Beginning from my own personal awareness the consciousness keeps widening.

The third strand of relational consciousness is to rejoice in and appreciate the world which gives me life. The beauty of nature, the wonder of the myriad of creatures that inhabit our spaceship earth. It was beautifully expressed by one of Nye's subjects. Looking at an ants' nest the child marvels at the different sense of reality there must be for a human observer and an ant, possibly unaware of this human presence. "I wonder if they know I'm here," she thinks. The capacity to marvel at our human presence in this vast universe is part of this third strand of relational consciousness.

Finally our capacity for relational consciousness allows us to appreciate "the mystery" or our God, if that is how we wish to name the source of life. It is the realisation that we are part of a vast cosmos and an underlying belief that our

part in it, small and insignificant though it may be, has meaning. We are part of a larger and meaning centred reality. This has been humanity's understanding through the ages. O'Murchu outlines how it is expressed for primitive peoples and time and again sees it expressed in symbol, worship and community. Different peoples but a similar need to find ways to express their relationship to "the mystery" and to find meaning. Perhaps in some ways they were more enlightened than we are. Frankl[27] refers to this phenomenon as the 'will to meaning', the common search of all human beings.

Hay and Nye believe this capacity for relational consciousness is an essential pre-requisite that allows recognition of the types of experience that some would define as "religious". The types of experience that Johnson believes fired the apostles and the early church.

My own research is based broadly on both the work of Hay as well as Ahern's[28] extensive analysis of written accounts held at the Religious Experience Research Centre in Lampeter. Johnson and William James before him, believe that the recognition of a power of force beyond the self that is in turn life-changing is fundamental to "religious" experience. However, Ahern suggests there are probably a range of such experiences set on a continuum of varying intensity. At one end is our day to day existence, within which we may hardly stop to reflect at all. At the other are those once or twice in a life time encounters, like Suzi's, that change reality for us. In between are a range of "aha" moments where we stop, perhaps only for an instant, to realise and reflect on some of the deeper questions of existence.

Hay[29] believes that, due to what he terms a "learned embarrassment" within our western society, our capacity for these intermediary moments is being systematically eroded. We are simply losing our capacity for relational consciousness.

Children of the Deaf

The best comparison I can make with young people in the west is with the CODA, the children of deaf adults. These children are born into a home where their natural ability to speak is never able to be either modelled or shared by their parents. Unless there is some outside intervention, these children will never learn to speak any language. Even with external intervention, their natural language, spoken at home, will always be signing, not speaking. Often they feel more at home with others in the deaf community rather than with the hearing community.



In public places they can seem uncontrollable, naughty children. Having never been corrected at home for making noise, screaming loudly, thumping the table, whatever extreme form they choose, they are simply unaware of how to behave. The hearing community finds them challenging to say the least.

The comparisons with unchurched families in the western world are obvious. Not quite as obvious is the inability many families have to foster the development of relational consciousness. The capacity to relate to God and to understand myself as God's creation is perhaps rarely spoken of at home. In a busy society where the thirty-second bed-time story is now a reality is there any time for parents to stop, wonder, marvel and share all of this with their children? If not, the children will probably follow their families in developing a mechanistic interpretation of the world. As Frankl^[30] says, as soon as man began to see himself as creator, rather than as a creature of God, he began to interpret himself in the image of his own creation – the machine. Hence the relationship with self and God is distorted. The capacity for relational consciousness is stunted and

indeed, while surely not dead, since this is a natural human capacity, may atrophy through lack of development. By analogy, we have possibly all met someone capable of moving their ears, but for most it is a capacity lost generations ago through lack of use. Hay believes, the same may be happening to relational consciousness.

Of even more importance for the children of their West is the consequent lack of capacity to understand the world around them and its people. Perhaps an example of their parents lack of development in this area is the current debate within the European Union on immigration, values and religious education. With increasing immigration from the third world, including Islamic countries, the people of “old” Europe, including the U.K., are experiencing the strain of having strong believers in their midst whom they quite simply find difficult to understand.

Lanser[31] quotes a figure of only 2000 mainstream Christians attending Church in Amsterdam on any weekend against over 24,000 who attend what she refers to as “immigrant churches”. It seems to be a shock to the sensitivities of modern Europe that those coming into the E.U. are believers. They really do believe there is a God, their Creator, and they live accordingly.

E.U. governments, frankly, are worried. Robert Jackson [32] outlines the urgency felt by educational leaders within the E.U. to have some form of civics education along with multi-faith religious education so that it can build appreciation of difference and tolerance of diversity. Of course, governments are also worried by what they see as fundamentalism. They fail to see that the suppression of relational consciousness by the enlightenment in the West has led to its own form of fundamentalism in which it is frowned on to speak about God publicly or to live and witness, at least in the public forum that people do believe in the underlying meaning of their lives as part of God’s creation.

This is the challenge for youth ministry. We in the West largely minister to the children of the deaf. Unlike the real CODA, however, they are the majority, not simply a small minority group. We have to assist them past the fundamentalism of the enlightenment^[33] to a genuine appreciation of the diversity of religious understanding and religious practice. This is vital for the future of our world.

THE TASK OF YOUTH MINISTRY



To summarise so far, I have looked briefly at some of the work of the writers in the International Research Project and suggested that the project is really writing about young people in a secular western society. Next I suggest that this western world is largely alienated from institutional church, regarding it as

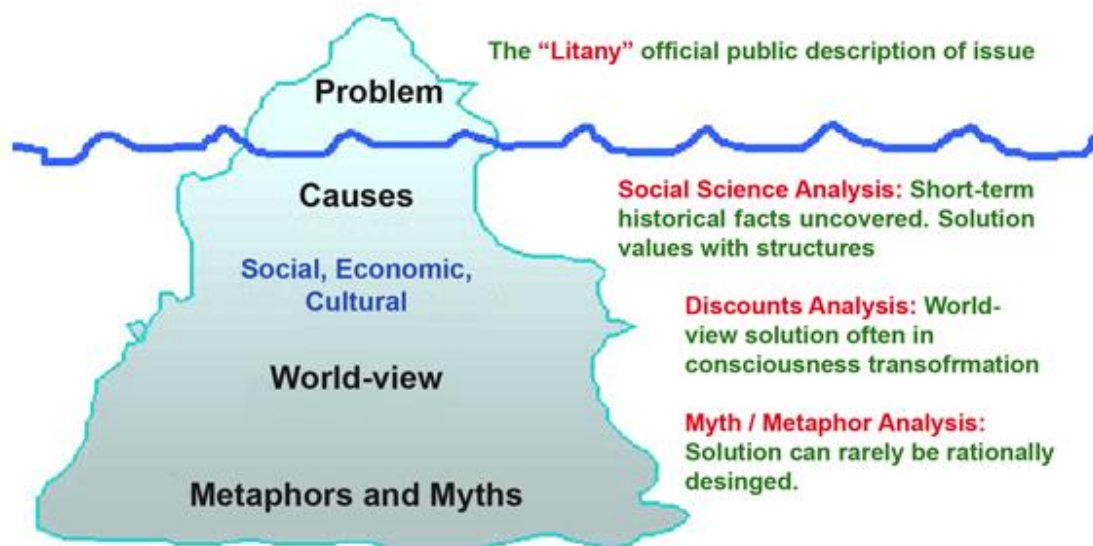
at best irrelevant. More importantly I have highlighted the increasing tendency to mute the individual's capacity for that form of consciousness, "relational consciousness", that allows us to experience the spiritual, transcendent dimension of our lives.

But, if Hardy and others are correct, this is impossible. Despite the pressure applied by a secular society, human beings **must** believe there is meaning. In Frankl's terms we have a "will to meaning". In the words of David Hay we know in our hearts there is "something there".[34]

The research writers differ in their interpretations of these issues and their suggestions on how youth ministers might address them. Baxter-Brown [35] confirms the secularising influence of the enlightenment and finds that Suzi accepts a reality of life beyond this framework because of her profound experience of a power beyond herself. He makes specific suggestions on how youth ministers might adapt their approach in the light of this. However, as has been explained, an appeal to experience alone is fraught with difficulty. It also seems to me to imply that the "problem" of youth ministry, if we define it as a problem, is about allegiance or conversion.

Wilkinson[36] highlights the significance of parent and family influence on the spirituality of young people and concludes that many of his sample appear to be influenced by the negative perceptions of their parents about God and grace. Certainly almost 60% of his sample believed any personal encounter with Jesus would be negative. He asked his respondents “what would Jesus say to you if you were to meet him today?” Most replied that Jesus would tell them to “stop” or “straighten up” and would be disappointed with them. This in turn caused me to ask myself what could be attractive to young people in such a negative view of Christianity.

Inayatullah’s[37] causal layered analysis framework (below) can be a useful framework in further analysing our situation. It would place both Baxter-Brown and Wilkinson’s analysis at the level of social causes. That is, we know there is a lack of allegiance to institutional church (the “litany level” of the issue) and that this stems from the secular, mechanistic approach to reality of the enlightenment, (the social cause). Although Wilkinson suggests that the world view of youth is largely determined by their families he does not suggest how we might examine this with youth. For me, engaging in dialogue around what Jesus might say were he to be with them betrays a latent desire to impose a particular world view on the discussion rather than to be open to having the discussion.



The Wilkinson response to what could be seen as a depressing picture for mainstream church wants to address this by evangelising more strongly. Hughes[38] sees this type of response as being driven by a particular theological perspective. The approach is to redouble our efforts to explain Jesus to young people so they will be clear what they must believe and why.

Despite what at first appears to be a different approach, I would place Tyson's[39] recommended way forward in a similar category. He is critical of the mass marketing approach, typical of evangelical youth ministry. For him, this may produce only temporary allegiance, one that makes churches feel good for a short time only. It targets the large middle ground of "hypermodern" spirituality that forms the centre of the Tyson spectrum across which he identifies a wide range of youth spiritualities.

Tyson's recommendation is that ministry aim at the spiritually hungry margin, the left or red end of the spectrum dominated by a radical post-secular youth. He sees that imposing a stereotypical, Evangelical view of Christianity may not address the need for mystical encounter, relational richness and holistic integration for these spiritual searchers. At first glance this could be seen as

addressing the need for a different world-view and even an openness to explore different ways to express the myths and metaphors of the Christian response.

In many ways this is the case, and hence I need to nuance my earlier comment that the approach does not address to the full depth of the issue. However, my sense is that he is driven by his own belief in the value of the non-conformist tradition of his particular approach to Protestantism. The underlying myth/metaphor driving the approach seems to be that this “brand” of Christianity needs to be preserved, although in a different form and with a group many would not have identified in the first instance.

As a Catholic educator I can empathise with this. My own approach would struggle not to be the same. I want to pass on the myths and metaphors of my own tradition but I believe the only way to do so is to be open to their re-interpretation and re-expression in a 21st century world. Both Radcliffe [40] and O’Murchu [41] see a need to re-define our language, our very expression of the mystery of Jesus in the light of what we now know about our world and our cosmos.

It is a huge task. As but one example, Mantovani[42] asks what it means to talk of our “first parents”, still part of the Catholic tradition, when we have scientific knowledge that would make such a reference a nonsense? O’Murchu asks how we can go beyond a theology that Jesus came to redeem us from the sin of Adam and Eve, a theology that diminishes the tens of thousands of years of aboriginal history and spirituality, to name but one group. Does the expression of a ‘necessary sin of Adam to merit Christ’s redemptive act’ need to be re-thought? Do young people make any sense of a father who is prepared to send his own son to his death? There may be no simple answers, since addressing myth and metaphor in this way is radical and a task to be undertaken by theologians, not researchers.

So, theologically, the task may be to redefine and re-express the myths and metaphors of our Christian spirituality. Experientially it may be to lead youth beyond frameworks to being able to meet their god and grapple with their own spirituality. To facilitate an awareness of themselves, the world and the “mystery”.

Rohr[43] laments the paucity of churches in “leading people into alternative transcendence experience”. He believes that when religion does not move to what he terms the “mystical level” then the tendency of the churches is to focus on morality or doctrine. Rohr believes that such a focus serves to give “ego a sense of bound aridness, of superiority, of control, of earning God’s love”. For him, “when you haven’t really experienced mercy, or forgiveness, the generosity of God, you have to bolster it up with all kinds of heroic affirmations about the nature of God, and you can tell it doesn’t mean very much”.

The challenge for the Christian churches and youth ministers is to get out of old paradigms and limiting faith proclamations and begin to speak to a new generation that yearns for spiritual experience and connectedness.

Myers[44] also pinpoints the paucity of a relevant language among young people in which they can speak about God. His theological perspective is insightful in taking us beyond a guided redefinition of world view and myth/metaphor to a conversation open to direction by the Holy Spirit. Myers reflects that while from a sociological perspective we may wonder what the need for this conversation says about the young, perhaps we need to ask what it should say to a theologian about God. Hughes[45] expresses it succinctly:

“If God is at work in the world, then embedded in that (sociological) description should be some hints about how God is working.”

Hughes believes that “part of the task is to identify the activity of the Transcendent”. He believes that this activity has often surprised us and hints that it may well do so again. Yet, neither theologically nor sociologically is the question “How?” easy to answer at the moment. If youth ministers and theologians cannot readily address the issue, there is still hope. It may be addressed by the young themselves.

Social researcher and commentator Hugh Mackay in speaking of Australian youth writes:

[Today’s youth] are members of a generation who spend all day together at school, then get on the bus to go home and ring each other up on the mobile phone, or send a stream of text messages to each other. “Where are you now? Who are you with?” they inquire solicitously, while their parents pay the bill for this flow of continuous contact. Then, when they arrive home, they hop on the internet to link up again in a chat room, or via email ... “They are a generation that beeps and hums,” one of their fathers recently remarked, and so they are. They are the generation who, having grown up in an era of unprecedentedly rapid change, have intuitively understood that they are each other’s most precious resource for coping with the inherent uncertainties of life. Their desire to connect, and to stay connected, **will reshape this society**. They are the harbingers of a new sense of community, a new tribalism, that will change everything from our old-fashioned respect for privacy to the way we conduct our relationships and build our homes. The era of individualism is not dead yet, but the intimations of its mortality are clear.[46]

Rankin also concludes that young people are crying out for relationships. Myers supports this, abhorring both what he terms a ‘ministry of performance’, aimed at keeping the young entertained, and a ‘ministry of purpose’, aimed at engaging

them in meaningful activity. Both recommend a ministry prepared to walk beside the young, engaging in the search and journey together but not targeted at conversion, evangelisation or any other intrusion into their lives. Was this the way of Jesus? Did he try to measure success, other than by engagement together? Jesus surely engaged at the myth and metaphor level, hence the parables, hence the over one hundred and eighty questions put to him of which, according to Rohr, he answers only three.

SUMMARY

In a short paper I have attempted to place the papers of the International Research Project in their context. They are sourced from a western secular society influenced by the enlightenment. This is not universal, and we do well to recognise that.



I have also suggested that those who work with youth must measure their success today by means other than numbers evangelised or even by how strongly the message of Jesus is presented. It should be measured by the depth of spirituality and the extent of openness of the minister who searches together with young people for new expressions of spirituality that will transform the world.

It is vital work. Given the capacity for young people to interact and communicate across the globe, this next generation, if Hugh Mackay is right, can change the world. Our task as youth ministers is to walk beside them with trust in the Holy Spirit that they can change it for the better. Environmentally, for the peace of all nations and the harmony of this global village, space-ship earth, we must hope they can.

Hughes sums it up in saying: “Churches need to respond by offering resources, rather than attempting to pass on a heritage.”

^{i[1]} Maiko, S. (2006). *Title TBA*. Unpublished manuscript. Paper submitted for the International Research Project in Youth Spirituality.

^{i[2]} Berger, P.L. (1999). (P. Berger, Ed.), *The desecularization of the world. A global overview* (pp. 1-18). Grand Rapids, Mich. Wm. 8 Eerdmans.

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