



## HISTORY OF YOUTH MINISTRY EDUCATION

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Before becoming enmeshed in the development of youth ministry education, one clarification needs to be made: no substantive change in youth ministry has come out of academia. While academics have tweaked around the edges of changes made at the grass roots of youth ministry, this has only been a fine tuning of what already existed. Youth ministry has always been a transaction between young people themselves or caring Christian adults and young people they perceive to be in need.

Joesph F. Kett comments, “the young men’s societies of the 17th through the 19th centuries had been organized by young men themselves; the young people’s movement of the 1880s and 1890s, in contrast, consisted entirely of youth supervised youth organizations” (Kett, 1977, p. 194). His classic history of adolescence in America from 1790 to 1977, referenced youth movements from the Sunday school, juvenile temperance movements, YMCA, YWCA, Christian Endeavor, denominational youth societies, and the Boy and Girl Scout movements, none of which grew out of academia.

Judith B. Erickson (1983), in her *Directory of American Youth Organizations*, identified over two hundred and fifty adult sponsored youth organizations which span eighteen categories ranging from religious organizations (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and other religions) to political, sports, hobby, temperance, ethnic heritage, and a variety of other groupings. Erickson comments, “The importance of voluntary effort as the mainstay of youth organizations cannot be overstated. Every one of the groups relies heavily on the service of volunteers and is rooted firmly in the national tradition of meeting needs through voluntary associations” (p. 4).

In *When God Shows Up: a History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, I identified three distinct cycles of youth ministry in America. Christian youth movements had several common components: unrest in

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society, a local visionary, a simple system, media coverage that popularized the movement, a spokesman to sustain and refine the movement, and an openness to a spiritual response (Senter, 2010, p. 69-93).

The fact that most youth ministries have been led by volunteers leads to two questions. What were the educational theories upon which youth ministry innovations were based and from where did these theories arise? In the nineteenth century youth ministry innovations grew out of three educational theories each of which were based in a Judeo-Christian worldview and were shaped by nineteenth century evangelicalism and various forms of pietism. Each of the three theories were championed by Protestant clergy or lay leaders.

The Sunday school found its initial theory in the rabbinic tradition of passing their religious tradition from generation to generation through rote memory of Torah for young people. Though Rabbis pushed mature students to interpret and not just recite, the majority of Sunday school teachers were satisfied with the recitation of Scripture and its application to life (Reed & Prevost, 1993, p. 49-51, 255-263; Elias, 2002, p. 120-124; Senter, 2010, p. 55-57).

The other two theoretical bases for youth ministry in the nineteenth century had to do with Christian revival and Christian nurture. Presbyterian pastor Theodore Cuyler conceived of prayer meetings for youth that would perpetuate the prayer revival tied to the YMCA in 1857-1859. The idea was expanded by another pastor, Francis E. Clark, to become the basis for the Christian Endeavor movement. Reacting to the revivalistic calls for repentance and conversions of youth from Protestant families, a third pastor, Horace Bushnell, called for basing ministry to children and youth in Christian nurture, stating "the child is to grow up a Christian, never knowing himself as being otherwise." According to Bushnell, the majority of Christian nurture takes place before the acquisition of language, i.e. before the age of three (Elias, 2002, p. 160-167; Senter 2010, p. 129-145).

As the twentieth century approached, liberal theology and progressive education offered youth ministry a departure from nineteenth century evangelicalism and piety. Academics offered a theoretical basis for youth ministry virtually disconnected from the supernatural. Kenda Creasy Dean comments, "By the 1920s and 1930s, the goals of the nascent field of youth ministry in mainline churches had become virtually indistinguishable from the goals of professional educators and public education – a realm wholly indifferent to the influence of Christian theology" (Dean, 2004, p. 40; Setran, 2007, p. 213-219).

For the most part, volunteer youth workers and church leaders outside mainline Protestantism did not accept the theoretical shift from evangelicalism and piety to liberal theology and progressive education. At least outside the mainline, twentieth century innovations in youth ministry remained grounded in nineteenth century theoretical

assumptions, and conservative Protestants felt academia had failed them. World War I demonstrated the poverty of the liberal assumptions that education would prove the key to bringing civilization to maturity. New theories would have to be sought.

With the sobering realization of the nearly non-existent role academia has played in the genesis of youth ministries, the question must be asked, What is the role of the academic in youth ministry? Thus, what role has youth ministry education played in the two century development of Christian youth ministry? The answer is both profound and simple. Youth ministry education exists to provide a theoretical and theological basis for the practice of youth ministry and to equip novice youth workers to assist young people to live their lives more Christianly.

A tension has arisen in youth ministry education, sometimes healthy and at other times not so healthy, between theology and the social sciences. Some colleges and seminaries tried to place youth ministry exclusively within a biblical or theological framework seeing little need to utilize methods developed in psychology, sociology, anthropology, counseling, education, or social work. Other schools, contending that all methods are human inventions, chose to use social scientific methods to shape theological discourse, leaving the Scripture as a client of the social sciences. Within this tension, youth ministry education has attempted to bring about an integration between theology and the social sciences.

To illustrate this type of integration, I would like to take the liberty to draw from my own experience. After four years of youth ministry in a church located in a socially changing neighborhood, I paused to reflect on the effectiveness of what I had been doing. The approach to youth ministry that I had used was eclectic but based on an adaptation of the Youth Fellowship strategy initiated thirty years before, yet heavily dependent on biblical instruction. Dissatisfied with the impact the ministry was having on the youth in my church, I began looking for something new.

A professor at the state university I attended authored a textbook on group dynamics built on the notion that human activities are goal oriented. I was intrigued with this idea and began asking how the professor's idea could be applied to my youth ministry. On a slip of paper that remains in the fly leaf of the text book, I sketched an idea that I would later call the Project Approach to Youth Ministry.

While intrigued with the freshness of the Project idea, I found it important to ground my innovation in theology. Two aspects of Pneumatology proved to be the answer. One had to do with the manner in which the Holy Spirit used spiritual gifts to build up the Body of Christ. Teenagers could explore their giftedness in a variety of goal oriented activities designed to serve people outside the youth ministry. As these activities came to conclusions, a second work of the Holy Spirit came into play. Christian adults who served as coaches for the various projects could

help young people discover their dependence on the convicting work of the Holy Spirit as they faced the pressure of effectively accomplishing their tasks. Many times these teenagers discovered a deeper dependence on the Lord to help them complete their project.

The following August, I met with the student leaders in a church to which I had moved and suggested a series of goal oriented activities that would allow students to explore their spiritual gifts culminating in a variety of ministries to the church and community. Task oriented activities in preparation for the final act of service would replace the existing youth group meetings. A musical performance, a play along with the building of props and costumes, a Thanksgiving dinner served to people at risk in our community, and a tutoring program in a nearby urban area, all coached by Christian adults generated an enthusiasm and intensity for Christian service that the church had never seen from its youth.

When I began researching the idea in order to write my master's thesis, I discovered a whole body of literature developed by educator William Heard Kilpatrick and his colleagues at the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York. Built on the educational philosophy of John Dewey, Kilpatrick developed the Project Method of childhood education (Kilpatrick, 1918). Adapting Kilpatrick's research and honing my own theory, I integrated it with my theological framework and found the kids with whom I was working growing spiritually. Soon I found myself invited to do workshops and write articles about the Project Approach to Youth Ministry. In time I was asked to contribute to an academic textbook on youth ministry as my innovation became part of the literature of the academy. I later joined the ranks of academia analyzing models of youth ministry as well as writing about the history of Protestant youth ministry.

Is my experience unique? Not really. Most of the interfacing of youth ministry with the academy has followed a similar trajectory. In the two hundred plus years of Protestant youth ministry three distinct cycles of youth ministry, each built on a theological base, have followed a pattern of innovation to theory to education in perpetuating and refining the manner in which youth ministry was done. In each cycle, both theology and educational theory were gradually lost and were replaced by an emphasis on programs. Eventually the various forms of youth ministry became disconnected from either culture or the essential work of the church. With this deterioration, a new expression of youth ministry emerged and a new cycle began (Senter, 1992).

Throughout the history of youth ministry two forms of education have appeared in a predictable fashion. First there were non-formal expressions of education found in conferences, workshops, non-credit training schools, training manuals and popular periodicals aimed at front line youth ministry workers. In time these were followed by formal expressions of education found in college classes, majors, and eventually

research degrees. The remainder of this article will trace the development of youth ministry education.

### **Non-Formal Youth Ministry Education**

Non-formal education most frequently has to do with shaping values in non-schooling models. The earliest forms of youth ministry education were found in two non-formal forms: union gatherings and published materials that included a training component. Union meetings, first promoted by associations of Sunday Schools, temperance groups and later by denominational groups, were opportunities for people who were interested in working with young people to gather for admonition and stimulation. These rallies modeled the best in youth ministry techniques of their day while reinforcing the theological and social outcomes desired by the host group.

#### *Union Gatherings*

The Sunday School movement understood its mission in educational terms. Initially it was a school for the poor and ethnic minority groups in Great Britain and America. The American Sunday School Union (ASSU), founded in 1824, sought to promote the Sunday School movement through providing inspiration and training for the volunteers who led local Sunday Schools. Though the national organization used the “union” idea in a different way, calling itself a “union,” the Sunday School movement was actually comprised of local Sunday School unions who brought Sunday School workers together for encouragement and training at “Union” meetings. These events were strong on inspiration and weak on training until the ASSU started holding national conventions where training workshops began to appear.

The Juvenile Temperance movement was the grandparent of modern local church youth ministry in that it was primarily focused on providing support to volunteers in Protestant churches to assist them in fostering one aspect of what they understood as moral behavior in children and youth. Little formal education was needed to accomplish the task they embraced. So, like the Sunday school movement, no formal education was provided for either workers or leaders. Unlike the Sunday School movement, the Juvenile Temperance movement was associated with a broader Temperance movement for adults that was rich in research on the effects of alcohol consumption. That research found its way into Juvenile Temperance movement training events and literature.

The Band of Hope, a British juvenile temperance organization, brought together as many as 5,000 young people and adults in festivals to promote the virtues of temperance using songs, choir anthems extolling temperance, as well as testimonies, stories, and messages which in turn were used by local temperance leaders to help young people live temperate lives. America saw similar meetings, especially associated

with American Temperance conventions in Saratoga, New York (Senter, 2010, p. 120-124).

As denominational groups observed the growing influence of the Sunday school and temperance groups they began sponsoring their own union meetings, combining the two emphases within their own theological framework and traditions. Denominational union gatherings were local rallies that generated enthusiasm for ministry to young people and children while at the same time proved to be excellent training vehicles where ideas about ministry were modeled and exchanged. It was very common for a song to be learned at a union rally on Saturday night and by the following week it was being sung in gatherings of youth all over the city. Brooklyn, New York, was a hot bed of youth ministry in the mid-nineteenth century. Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregational denominations all had union gatherings (Senter, 2010, p. 169-181).

The YMCA, while influential upon the youth ministry of the nineteenth century, chose to train leaders in training schools rather in union gatherings. The YMCA, unlike the other youth ministry movements, professionalized their movement relatively early. As a result, the need to standardize their training called for greater depth and technical training. This model of training more closely paralleled youth ministry education in the last quarter of the twentieth century than that of any of the other youth ministry movements of its own day.

In its early years, the YMCA was closely associated with revival movements and intentional evangelism efforts. The theology of the movement drew its teachings from a simple understanding of the Gospel that focused on repentance and confession of faith. More complex doctrines, while present in the writings of such leaders as Oswald Chambers, emphasized a holiness of life more than doctrinal orthodoxy. As the YMCA expanded its operations and found it necessary to formalize training schools into colleges, core evangelical doctrines gave way to a more liberal theological perspective (Senter, 2010, p. 109-111, 213).

Perhaps the most sophisticated union gatherings were associated with the Christian Endeavor movement. When the Christian Endeavor Society burst on the youth ministry scene in 1881, annual conventions quickly followed. By 1895 the convention held in Boston was reported to have been attended by 56,425 Endeavorers. Like the earlier union meetings, which Christian Endeavor also had, the annual conventions held for nearly fifty years served as the movement's primary educational leadership development instrument. Ideas from all over the world of Christian Endeavor were showcased and promoted at these gatherings. Core values were reinforced. Vision for future ministry was cast. Unlike the YMCA, Christian Endeavor determined to remain grounded in local churches and their affiliated denominations with their doctrinal distinctives. Consequently, formal training institutions affiliated with Christian Endeavor never emerged (Senter, 2010, p. 158-159).

### *Newspapers and Published Materials*

Newspapers and published materials were the most influential form of youth ministry education in nineteenth and early twentieth century volunteer driven youth ministry movements such as Sunday School, Juvenile Temperance, and Christian Endeavor. This type of publication remained important for leadership training in the church youth fellowship movement that followed in the middle of the twentieth century. These publications went directly to the volunteers who were doing youth ministry and provided them with inspiring stories of what was happening elsewhere and a wealth of ideas intended to help local youth ministries achieve their vision of shaping the lives of young people. In this way they were the blogs and websites of their day.

*The American Sunday-School Teacher's Magazine and Journal of Education* began in 1823 and was followed over the years by a host of similar newspapers for Sunday School leaders, providing a virtual pathway for tracking the ideas offered to Sunday School leaders. The doctrinal groundings of these papers were evangelical, both in their emphasis on evangelism and in the literal manner in which the Bible was interpreted. Doctrinal issues were left to denominational groups but a core understanding of historic Christian doctrines was assumed.

*The Cold Water Army and Picnic* was a weekly newspaper published in the 1830s, which provided stories, testimonies, admonitions, riddles, and program suggestions for adults working with temperance groups. The paper reinforced the importance of what the adult volunteers, many of whom were women, were doing with youth while at the same time providing them with new ideas and a sense of being a part of the larger army of temperance workers.

The YMCA was also a prolific publisher of newspapers in the nineteenth century. Though the YMCA had national publications like *Association Men*, *Association Boys*, *Association Boys' Work Journal*, the centralized approach taken by the Sunday school, juvenile temperance movement and Christian Endeavor was supplemented by bulletins and newspapers for the inspiration and development of YMCA workers in every region of the country and all over the world. In Chicago, for example, *Everybody's Paper*, *Heavenly Tidings*, *The Watchman*, *Young Men's Era*, and the *Bulletin* were nineteenth century YMCA publications (Hopkins, 1951, p. 554-555, 463; Dedmon, 1957, p. 79, 82-83).

*The Golden Rule* and later *The Christian Endeavor World*, the official voices of Christian Endeavor, were perhaps the most effective non-formal educational tool in the movement that claimed millions of members worldwide. Edited by Amos Wells, these publications provided monthly reports of activities from local societies, stories, program ideas, inspiring thoughts on how people had been helped in their endeavor to know God, as well as the inspiration which came from being a part of a world-wide movement. These monthly publications provided effective

non-formal training for youth leaders (Clark, 1930, p. 98-99; Pratt, 1891, p. 81-83). In addition, training manuals for leaders were a very important part of Christian Endeavor and the YMCA. These manuals were collections of best practices in the two movements put into basic "how to" formats (Hopkins, 1951, p. 468; Wells, 1896; Wells 1900; Wells 1911).

For fourteen years, from the beginning of the Great Depression through most of World War II, less non-formal youth ministry education took place probably due to the expense involved. Evelyn McClusky's Miracle Book Club had a newsletter entitled *The Conqueror* that shared news from clubs across the country (Senter, 2010, p. 216-218). Percy Crawford broadcasting on the Young People's Church of the Air over 275 radio stations effectively introduced a staccato style of communicating to youth (Senter, 2010, p. 260-262). The United Christian Youth Movement in conjunction with the International Council of Religious Education introduced the idea of Youth Fellowship to replace the older approach of Youth Societies (Senter, 2010, p. 199-200). Youth camps and conferences continued but were limited by the Depression and World War II. Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian publishing houses produced training materials for church youth fellowship leaders, introducing the new concept of Youth Fellowships (Senter, 2010, 200-209; Bergler, 2012, p. 69-71).

Then with the sudden appearance of the Youth for Christ movement conferences for youth and their leaders once again came into vogue. Youth for Christ Magazine followed the model of *The Golden Rule* in spreading ideas for ministering to America's youth. Conferences and the magazine continued into the sixties and were supplemented by a mid-winter business meeting and training conference that helped maintain the Insight/Impact philosophy of campus ministry. Similarly, throughout the post-war era, mainline Protestant youth departments continued to promote the youth fellowship model and made use of publications and conferences to try to train teen leaders and their adult advisors. Not surprisingly, the youthquake of the 1960s caused all youth ministry organizations to engage in extended reflection and experimentation with different methods and theories, which in turn were communicated through non-formal education settings (Bergler, 2012, p. 176-207).

### *Twentieth Century Training Conferences*

While YMCA and denominational camps continued to model methods of youth work, Youth for Christ regional and national conventions demonstrated new approaches for Evangelical youth ministry in the 1950s and 1960s. Then Youth Specialties broke onto the youth ministry education scene in 1970 with the first National Youth Workers Convention attended by people interested in developing their skills as youth ministers. With no clear philosophy of how youth ministry should be done, the conventions brought together an eclectic set of approaches



to youth ministry, combined with humor, cultural analysis, strategies developed in churches and para church groups across the nation all of which were informed by a healthy infusion of findings from the social sciences. Since YS founders Mike Yaconelli and Wayne Rice came out of the Youth for Christ movement and the Church of the Nazarene, a smaller evangelical denomination, the de facto theological perspective of the training events in the early days reflected their evangelical roots. Youth workers responded with enthusiasm and soon Youth Specialties offered traveling one day seminars to benefit youth workers who could not attend the national convention.

Beginning in 1974, *Group Magazine*, founded by Thomas and Joni Schultz, filled a training gap by providing information to assist local youth workers in their ministries. When Youth Specialties temporarily moved away from an exclusive youth ministry emphasis, Group moved into the gap and started their own training conference.

About the same time, Dann Spader created a leadership development system around a single philosophy which he called Sonlife. In 1979, for the first time since the beginning of Christian Endeavor in 1881, Spader produced non-formal training dedicated to a single philosophy of youth ministry. While attractive primarily to Evangelical denominations, several of which adopted Sonlife as their official youth ministry training program, the system showed little regard for the social sciences. Levels of certification for attendees became a motivating factor for youth workers, some of whom were by this time teaching youth ministry in formal education settings.

In 1995, Pete Ward and the Oxford Youth Works called for British youth ministry to get serious about research into youth ministry rather than merely perpetuating primarily American models. They hosted a research conference at Mansfield College, Oxford University, attended by youth workers from Great Britain, the British Commonwealth, the United States, and Europe. The conference differed from previous youth ministry conferences in that it was much more academically oriented and research focused than previous non-formal educational conferences. It was more like the beginning of a research association and gave birth to the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry.

### **Formal Youth Ministry Education**

Formal youth ministry education came in two waves. Both were tied to the professionalization of youth ministry. In the nineteenth century, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) recognized a need for well trained professional workers (General Secretaries) as the movement spread around the world. After the first World War, formal schools developed, both associated with independent colleges and aligned with American universities. Following World War II, as Young Life and Youth for Christ expanded and then inspired similar church based youth min-

istries, a second wave of youth ministry education took place connected with Christian colleges and seminaries.

### *Formal Youth Ministry Education by the YMCA*

The need for General Secretaries to lead YMCA organizations in major cities gave rise to formal educational structures. Unlike the other youth ministry movements of the period, YMCA ministries relied on paid staff members and required buildings in which to house their work. These professional staff needed a set of skills and abilities more aligned with business men than with the evangelists who founded the movement. This complexity was intensified as YMCAs began reaching out to college and university students whose academic training required a greater knowledge of academic disciplines than General Secretaries typically had. As a result, early training schools provided workers with instruction related to the history of the YMCA, management of buildings, methods of work by departments, business management, and a smattering of biblical studies (Dedmon, 1957, p. 79; Hopkins, 1951, p. 175; Putney, 2001, p. 60-71). Training schools were held during the summer in resort locations.

By the 1880s, the General Secretary positions in the YMCA had become decidedly professional and a call went out to provide academic training similar to law and medical schools. Responding to this need, two schools developed over the next forty years. Western Secretarial Institute based in Chicago, Illinois (later renamed George Williams College) was spearheaded by Robert Weidensall and a committee of Midwest business men. The School for Christian Workers (later called Springfield College) developed under the leadership of David Allen Reed, a Congregational pastor, in Massachusetts. The former provided training for only YMCA workers while the later offered what amounted to a major for YMCA General Secretaries as well as four other tracks of training (Dedmon, 1957, p. 120; Hopkins, 1951, p. 173-178; Putney, 2001, p. 66).

Since there were no textbooks, classes were based on lectures from experienced General Secretaries. These quickly became printed class notes (handbooks) and later text books. The schools began with a two year curriculum and after World War I they were incorporated as colleges. In 1888 the YMCA World Conference in Stockholm congratulated the American YMCA on the establishment of the training schools and recommended that young men enter the profession (Hopkins, 1951, p. 176).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the YMCA in America began dividing into two camps with the liberal Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch leading the way to a "vigorous, robust, muscular Christianity ... devoid of all the et cetera of creed" (Putney, 2001, p. 40) This group relied heavily on the rapidly developing social science disciplines

to shape their approach to training YMCA workers. They embraced modern science, evolution, and the new science of Biblical criticism. The authority for their work shifted from the Bible to the disciplines of modern science. Much of the national leadership of the YMCA followed this more liberal trend (Hopkins, 1951, p. 532-538; Setran, 2007, p. 190-197)

Conservatives in the movement retained convictions that the Bible and Christian doctrine should be at the core of the YMCA ministry. These leaders identified with D. L. Moody and Robert McBurney, both of whom died in 1899. But most local Association workers retained conservative social gospel convictions championed by John R. Mott well into the twentieth century. The early years of "Hi-Y" clubs starting in 1910, attempted to sustain the more conservative perspective grounded in muscular Christianity (Hopkins, 1951, p. 510-512; Ladd and Mathisen, 1990, p. 78, 86; Setran, 2005, p. 207-210)

The curriculum of the two formal training schools developed over time but remained committed to an emphasis "body, mind, and spirit" symbolized by the YMCA triangle to include muscular Christianity, academic preparation and personal conversion. These emphases remained as long as Luther Gulick directed the Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts. He moved elsewhere in 1903 (Ladd and Mathisen, 1990, p. 86; Putney, 2001, p. 69-70). After Gulick's departure, academic disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and social work as well as business and management came to dominate the curriculum in Springfield. The Midwest training school that would become George Williams College retained a more moderate theological position. Ultimately the training schools would become one of the influences that shaped the future of the movement. By the end of World War II, the YMCA's roots in evangelicalism and pietism lost their central role in favor of less explicitly Christian forms of academic preparation for General Superintendents.

This swing to progressive religious education was anchored by a strong coalition between the YMCA movement and teachers at Teachers College and Union Theological Seminary in New York, described by David P. Setran as "a potent combination of liberal Protestantism and liberal progressive education then at the zenith of its influence." These luminaries of educational theory included George A. Coe, John Dewey, Harrison Elliott, William Heard Kilpatrick, and Goodwin Watson (Setran, 2005, p. 229).

Other summer training schools developed regionally leading to affiliations with colleges and universities. The Southern YMCA Graduate School affiliated with Vanderbilt University's Peabody College for Teachers. Scarritt College for Christian Workers was established after World War I and became the graduate program for YMCA education. Other training schools were associated with Yale Divinity School, Whittier College, Columbia University, Union Theological Seminary, and New York School of Social Work (Hopkins, 1951, p. 610-614). In time, the original

General Secretary training programs of the YMCA evolved into formal academic disciplines. Theology and ties with Christian studies were lost in university settings.

The Religious Education Association founded in 1903 by William Rainey Harper, the first President of the University of Chicago, drew heavily on social science and educational disciplines to provide a sound educational model for church ministry as well as the YMCA. For years there was a section of the Religious Education Association for leaders of the YMCA. Noted religious educator and Professor at Northwestern University, George Albert Coe, was a frequent speaker for the YMCA attempting to bridge the gap between formal theology and the other academic disciplines in university and mainline seminary settings. But in the process, more liberal expressions of Christian theology came to dominate the new field of Religious Education and in turn, the YMCA (Hopkins, 1951, p. 508).

In time YMCA leadership education became a function of schooling and soon churches modeled their Sunday schools and other educational efforts after the public schools. Both mainline denominational churches and the fundamentalists embraced the schooling model while moving in different directions related to the nature of scripture, the relevance of historic Christian theology, and the mission of the church. While the American YMCA embraced the Social Gospel of Rauschenbusch, their counterparts in the rest of the world maintained much of their emphasis on Bible studies, evangelization and Christian piety.

#### *Southern Baptists Revive Youth Ministry Education*

With the post-World War II acknowledgement of teenagers as a distinctive market for commercial products, the Southern Baptist Convention responded by hiring a Professor of Youth Education in 1949 to serve in the School of Religious Education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. While only having a masters degree when he started teaching, Phillip B. Harris taught in the Master of Religious Education program thus placing youth ministry education in the discipline of Religious Education (Merrick, 1994, p. 45; Taylor, 1982, p. 14; Ross, 1991, p. 18). According to Bruce Lee Merrick (1994), Harris' doctoral dissertation in 1954 entitled "The Youth Director" established the vocational identity for professional youth ministry (p. 1-2)

Phillip B. Harris identified seven themes that he thought should shape the Youth Director's vocational identity among Southern Baptists. Youth directors were to be Christ-centered, enthusiastic for their task, builders and sustainers of teams, apt to engage an array of issues, convinced that young people were the church of today, committed to integrating all of the church's ministries to youth (Sunday school, family ministries, camping and evangelistic ministries as well as the youth group), while involving young people in planning their own activities

(Merrick, 1994, p. 68-95).

Timothy Jones reports that Southern Seminary opened its School for Religious Education in the 1953-1954 session with Gaines Dobbins as Dean offering courses (though not a full degree) in Religious Education of Intermediates and Young People. In its first session, Assistant Professor of Religious Education Sabin Paul Landry, Jr. taught the two courses focused on work with Intermediates and Young People: (1) Religious Education 461: Religious Education of Intermediates and Young People and (2) Religious Education 462: Psychology of Adolescence and Youth (Jones & Winters, 2013).

Youth ministry courses in Southern Baptist seminaries continue to be housed in Religious Education departments or schools. Since Southern Baptist seminaries are free standing, not placed within university structures, efforts to draw upon the social sciences have been subject to the changing theological tides of denominational and seminary leadership.

#### *Young Life's Model of Formal Education for Youth Ministry*

With the rise of the Youth for Christ movement in the 1930s and 1940s, Evangelical Christians sought to revitalize youth ministry, especially since many Protestant youth ministry organizations had either become more liberal, like the YMCA, or were in institutional decline, like Christian Endeavor. The leaders of the movement were products of evangelical seminaries and Bible colleges. Most cut their teeth in ministry closely associated with the seemingly discredited fundamentalist movement. But by the time the Youth for Christ movement gained national visibility because of youth evangelists like Percy Crawford (Westminster Seminary), Jim Rayburn (Dallas Seminary), Torrey Johnson (Northern Baptist Seminary) and Billy Graham (Wheaton College), these youth ministry innovators had pioneered a twentieth century form of evangelicalism. A high view of Scripture and a passion for the Gospel once again came to the forefront in this form of Christian youth ministry (Carpenter, 1997).

Young Life was first to provide formal training of youth workers in 1954 when the movement established the Young Life Institute in Colorado Springs. As Young Life began recruiting staff from places other than seminaries and Christian colleges, the movement found the need for a more well rounded training of staff and as a result created a summer program that was chartered by the State of Colorado and empowered to be offered as a Master of Arts Degree. All of the faculty were adjuncts associated with accredited colleges and seminaries. Faculty included such scholars as Arthur Holmes (Wheaton), David Hubbard (Westmont), Paul Jewett (Fuller), Kenneth Kantzer (Wheaton), Bernard Ramm (California Baptist Seminary), Karl Turekian (Yale), Paul Wooley (Westminster), Ronald Youngblood (Bethel) and others. With few exceptions, these were biblical scholars or theologians. None of the professors were youth min-

istry specialists (Young Life Institute, 1961, 1962, 1964).

Al Rogness, President of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, opened a dialog between Young Life and Seminary leaders which resulted in partnerships with Luther (St. Paul, MN), Fuller (Pasadena, CA), North Park (Chicago, IL), and Gordon Conwell (South Hamilton, MA) Theological Seminaries (Meredith, 1978, p. 122-127). In the fall of 1970 accredited Master of Arts programs in youth ministry began at Luther and Fuller (Institute of Youth Ministries 1992, p. B1-16).

The collaborations that followed had modest enrollments. In 1973, for example, the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary/Young Life program was established with Dean Borgman teaching a youth ministry course for the Seminary, working with three recruited students. The program grew slowly in the 1970s and blossomed in the 1980s, then diminished in the 1990s. When the program became unsustainable financially at Gordon Conwell, it was cut from the seminary curriculum, although for many years youth ministry courses were still offered at the Hamilton and Boston campuses (Borgman, 2013).

The relationship with Fuller Theological Seminary was much more stable. In 1977, the Institute of Youth Ministries was formed under the leadership of Fuller theologian D. Paul Jewett, focusing much of the Young Life seminary cooperation program on the Fuller relationship (Institute of Youth Ministries, 1992, p. B1-22; Institute of Youth Ministries, 1979, p. 5). Darrell Guder was brought onto Young Life staff in 1976 and he expanded the Institute offerings to a twenty-four course Master of Arts in Theology with Fuller whereby Young Life staff members could earn their degree from Fuller in Colorado Springs. By 1979 the curriculum was fully developed.

The curriculum fit within the Master of Arts in Theology that Fuller offered on their Pasadena campus. The courses in theology, church history, and biblical studies were those of Fuller Theological Seminary. Training for youth ministry, including the two Practicum courses, were done under regional Young Life directors, while attempting to develop an incarnational approach. The hope was that this incarnational theology of youth ministry would provide a grounding for Young Life's approach to evangelism and discipleship for high school youth done in clubs, camps, and in their follow up program they called Campaigners.

#### *Christian College Majors in Youth Ministry*

As churches in the United States began hiring youth ministers in the 1970s and 1980s, this new expression of professional youth ministry turned to Bible Institutes, independent Christian colleges, and evangelical seminaries to provide academic formation of youth workers. Grounded in evangelical theology and differing expressions of evangelical pietism, these educational institutions followed the established ministerial preparation model that drew upon biblical and theological studies complemented by pastoral skills in pastoral theology, missions,

and counseling. Though church youth ministry training continued the focus on high school students begun in the post-World War II era by para church youth ministries Young Life and Youth for Christ, the curriculum looked more like a pre-seminary curriculum than a professional degree in youth ministry.

Most Bible institutes, Christian liberal arts colleges, and twentieth century expressions of evangelical seminaries offered a youth ministry course or two within their Christian education majors modeled after the Southern Baptist approach. Few offered anything more. Text books reflected the Christian Education orientation including a conscious attempt to utilize both social sciences and theology to anchor youth ministry methods. When Moody Press released the edited works *Youth and the Church* in 1968 (Irving & Zuck) and *Youth Education in the Church* ten years later (Benson & Zuck) and Zondervan Press published *Youth Ministry* in 1972 by Lawrence O. Richards, youth ministry education was poised to emerge as a distinctive discipline.

The earliest majors in Youth Ministry appeared in the mid-seventies in Christian liberal arts colleges and Bible colleges. *Campus Life's* "Guide to Christians Colleges" listed Sterling College, associated with the United Presbyterian Church of U. S. A., as offering a major in Youth Leadership in October 1976. The following year, Miami (FL) Christian College also listed a Youth Leadership major while Pacific Christian College (Fullerton, CA) and Rockmont College (Denver, Co) included Youth Ministry among their minors. By the time the "Majors Matrix" was included in the *Campus Life* Guide in October 1984, thirty of the sixty-four colleges listed offered youth ministry majors. Many of these proved to be better defined as concentrations within other majors, but by the end of the decade thirty of the seventy two colleges listed offered complete youth ministry majors with an additional fourteen offering concentrations (*Campus Life Magazine*, 1976-1989).

Many of these early youth ministry majors were marketing devices designed to attract students who were on the front edge of the transition from parachurch to church based youth ministries. Rather than creating a distinct discipline, schools collected courses from a cross section of the disciplines found in their schools. It was not unusual to find the catalog listing of courses to include courses from psychology, sociology, business, education or Christian education, social work, theology and even physical education or recreation. Only two or three youth ministry courses had distinctly Youth Ministry labels.

One of early example of youth ministry education was at Barrington (RI) College begun in 1976 with Gary Fagan as the primary instructor. The major survived the school's merger with Gordon College even though the merger converted the Bible college into a liberal arts college in 1985 (Cannister, 2013). A Youth Ministry major appeared in *Campus Life Magazine* for Gordon College in October 1982 though it did

not appear in the college catalog until after the merger.<sup>1</sup>

The Barrington model was a very well conceptualized approach to youth ministry education. The *Barrington College Bulletin* for 1976 described the competences to be developed by graduates of the program as (1) knowledge and understanding of contemporary youth culture; (2) understanding of the psychological and sociological developmental forces which impinge upon teenage youth; (3) developing skills in applying Biblical insights to the problems youth experience; (4) developing a basic philosophy of youth leadership which will apply in many cultural situations; (5) developing basic skills in organizing and implementing a ministry to youth in a local church. (*Barrington College Bulletin*)

Six Youth Ministry courses (Introduction, Communicating Christian Faith, Organization of Youth Program, Curriculum for Youth Ministries, Directed Study, Youth Leadership) and an Internship were supplemented with courses in Physical Education, Psychology, Social Work, Philosophy, and Biblical Studies in the 32 semester hour program. The Barrington program demonstrated an educational sophistication not seen at other schools until as many as fifteen years later.

The youth ministry major at Trinity College (Deerfield, Il), exemplifies a less sophisticated beginning. In 1984 the college housed the new major in the Christian Ministries Department with youth pastors teaching the skills courses. In addition to Bible and theology courses, the required youth ministry major classes included Survey of Christian Education, Introduction to Christian Ministry, and Teaching the Bible. Six classes related to adolescents were also required. They included Methods of Recreation, Arts and Crafts, Developmental Psychology, Interpersonal Skills Training, and three Physical Education classes (Trinity College). The following year the Youth Ministry Major emerged in its own right as a youth ministry discipline began to take shape with courses like Methods of Youth Ministry and Advanced Methods of Youth Ministries and recommended courses in Human Sexuality, Organizational Psychology, and Management.

In a 1993 article in *Youthworker Journal* entitled "Where to go to School: Youth Ministry Majors, Graduate and Undergraduate" twenty-eight Christian colleges were cited as having youth ministry majors and thirty-two other undergraduate schools offered concentrations in youth ministry while fourteen seminaries were listed as having masters level programs in youth ministry. Partially as a result of this article, an organization was formed that became known as the Association of Youth Ministry Educators in 1994. The Association quickly bonded with an annual professional conference and a journal, the *Journal of Youth Ministry*.

A 2009 study of youth ministry majors and master degree programs by Travis McNair suggested the most common class subjects in the programs studied were youth ministry (usually an introductory



course), youth culture and/or trends, youth discipleship and leadership, adolescent psychology, communicating to adolescents, and ministering to adolescents (McNair, 2009, p. 118). When examining what were considered to be the foundational youth ministry classes, the following themes emerged: biblical, theological, and philosophical foundations; an introduction and overview; present models; critical competences of youth ministers; adolescent development; and ministry to families (McNair, 2009, p. 132). Some of the programs required courses to be taken from other academic departments in order to complete the program. McNair concluded that the academic institutions he studied, “do not just say that they have a youth ministry class or two, but they actually have fully developed youth ministry programs that are aimed at producing theologically grounded practitioners of youth ministry” (McNair, 2009, p. 186).

That same year *Christian Education Journal* released findings from a major study of the field of Christian Education. The section on youth ministry focused on Evangelical schools associated with the Association of Theological Schools (14), the Association for Biblical Higher Education (16), and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (16). Wesley Black identified seven themes.

1. Youth ministry is an adolescent program. By this Black referred to the "adolescentness" of the programs investigated. Sometimes vibrant, brash, edgy, and ahead of the pack and at other times rebellious and clashing with other disciplines.
2. Institutions have benefitted from the role youth ministry has played in program offerings.
3. Institutions have not yet resolved the questions of identity and relationship of youth ministry to other fields of ministry preparation.
4. Youth ministry has a continuing struggle with theory and praxis.
5. Seminaries, universities, and Bible colleges have not yet fully addressed the role each plays in youth ministry preparation. By this Black raised the question of whether there should be an analogy to pre-med and medical school programs to prepare youth workers for ministry.
6. There is a need for well-equipped professors of youth ministry in each level of institution.
7. There is uncertainty about the career path for graduates of youth ministry programs (Black, 2009, p. S137-S142).

While Black's study surfaced a continuing tension between theology and social sciences in some of the forty-six schools studied, the tension seemed to appear most in seminaries (Black, 2009, p. S135). For the most part undergraduate schools appear to have developed a balance between the two. Or perhaps close ties between undergraduate youth

ministry faculty and the Christian Education field influenced these pioneering youth ministry faculty members to see less tension between theology and the social sciences than more theologically oriented seminary faculty and administrators sometimes did. The rigor with which schools have pursued integration between theology and the social sciences has created a symbiotic relationship in the field of youth ministry.

### *Research Doctoral Programs*

In the years since the founding of Young Life's Institute of Youth Ministries and the establishment of undergraduate youth ministry programs, three generations of youth ministry professors helped shape the ministries of youth workers. The first were practitioners with a wide variety of ministerial training but little education beyond the Masters level of study. The second generation were practitioners who had gone on for research doctorates in state, private, Catholic universities. Exceptions to this generalization were found in Southern Baptist and mainline denominational schools where Religious Education or Christian Education departments existed. The third generation of youth ministry professors were products of doctoral programs shaped by the second generation of youth ministry professors. The developers of doctoral programs in seminaries were an interesting mix of the second and third generations of youth ministry professors.

There really is not a pure doctoral program in youth ministry. Programs are located in other disciplines (Practical Theology, Christian Education, Praxis of Education, Church Leadership, and Educational Studies, to name a few) which allow dissertations to focus on issues related to youth ministry. Research degrees include the Doctor of Education and Doctor of Philosophy. Some schools offer a track in their Doctor of Ministry program which is considered an applied or ministry degree.

The school that has produced the largest number of doctoral graduates in the field of youth ministry (now referred to as Student Ministries) is Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary which graduated Doug Wood as its first doctor in Youth Ministry 1979. His degree was an EdD. Since that time twenty-four others have earned research doctorates all of which have been designated PhDs (Black, 2013). Southern Baptist Theological Seminary started offering a Ph.D in Youth ministry under the Praxis of Education in 1998. This continued until 2005 when it was moved into the Leadership focus area. Seven people have been awarded academic doctorates in youth ministry (Jones & Winters, 2013).

After the turn of the twenty-first century, Fuller and Princeton Theological Seminaries began granting doctorates in youth ministry. Both have research centers specializing in youth ministry. Fuller Youth Institute has built a reputation around funded research in "Sticky Faith" (Christian faith that continues after high school) while Princeton's Institute for Youth Ministries sponsor forums that feature nationally known

researchers dealing with themes related to youth ministry. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Talbot Theological Seminary have also graduated PhD students whose research focused on youth ministry.

### **Rethinking a Theology of Youth Ministry Education**

Since the emergence of parachurch Christian youth ministries around the time of World War II, conservative Protestant youth ministry found its grounding in Evangelical theology and various understandings of pietism.<sup>2</sup> Preparation for the evangelism of youth and various approaches to discipleship (or follow up, as it was originally called) dominated efforts to train or educate youth workers.

With the emergence of the Young Life Institute in 1954, a distinctive effort was made to ground youth evangelization in theology. The resulting Incarnational Evangelism was initially more of a missional strategy than a well-developed theology of youth ministry. Primarily based on John 1:14, the call was for adult youth workers to enter the world of students, to go where they were, in order to earn the right to present the Christian Gospel to them. The word *incarnate* comes from two Latin words when put together mean “in flesh” and the emphasis in the early Young Life years was that youth workers should represent Jesus among young people by doing life with them (in the flesh), not just calling kids to come to church. Darrell Guder, Director of the Institute of Youth Ministries starting in the late seventies, explained evangelism that was “incarnational” in an article published in *International Review of Mission*. Crediting Young Life with being the first group to use incarnational language, he explained

What they (Young Life) were expressing with this term was that the communication of the gospel be appropriate to its content. The message, the messenger, and the communication of the message should be seen as a whole, based upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Guder, 1994, p. 420).

A course entitled Theology of Incarnational Evangelism was introduced in the curriculum of the Youth Ministry Institute in 1980 using *A Book of Readings: Incarnational Evangelism* as a text. The book included articles by a number of theologians with the aim to ground Young Life practice in theology (Comee & Guder, 1987; Knipp, 2013).

As a fraternity of youth ministry educators developed both in the United States and the United Kingdom, calls were made on both sides of the Atlantic to bring together youth ministry academics to present and discuss current research in their emerging field. What would come to be called the Association of Youth Ministry Educators met in October 1994 at Talbot Theological Seminary in California to discuss how to collaborate. On the other side of the Atlantic, the first Conference on

Youth Ministry was held at Mansfield College in Oxford in January of the following year. The conference would give birth to the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry (Ward, 1998, p. 1-7).

In the years that followed both organizations published books and journals that raised the quality of academic reflection on the issues confronting youth ministry education. One of the central issues in the United Kingdom was the question of the theological grounding for youth ministry.

*Starting Right: Thinking theologically About Youth Ministry* (Dean, Clark & Rahn, 2001), proposed a new theological direction for youth ministry education. Shaped by the need for professors in mainline denominational seminaries to ground their approaches to youth ministry in a theological perspective acceptable to the tenured professors at their schools, practical theology was chosen. Placing youth ministry within practical theology left room for youth ministry educators to draw upon contemporary theologians as well as the Evangelical tradition for grounding their discipline.

On the east coast of the United States, Kenda Creasy Dean at Princeton Theological Seminary engaged the work of James Loder and Richard Osmer to provide a way to free youth ministry from the dominance of the social sciences. Concurrently on the west coast, Kara Powell, Cheryl Crawford, and Chap Clark built on the Practical Theology of Ray Anderson to bring the social sciences into the theological discussion of youth ministry.

The conversations that followed at conferences and in books and journal articles showed a lively and at times confusing debate over an appropriate theological grounding for youth ministry education. Reformed theologians, exemplified by Malan Nel, argued for understanding youth ministry as a manifestation of God coming to the church that is inclusive as a part of congregation as a whole (2001, p. 2-22). Lutherans, such as Andy Root (2007), grounded youth ministry within a relational Christology. Para church thinkers like Dean Borgman continued to ground youth ministry in an incarnational approach to missiology (Borgman, 1995). Meanwhile, the majority of youth ministry educators continued to blend youth evangelism and Christian living (Dunn, 1997).

These east and west coast youth ministry educators in the United States as well as some of their counterparts in Europe continue to explore a rather complicated assortment of approaches to ground youth ministry in practical theology. These efforts appeal to a wide cross section of youth ministry educators. But to other educators as well as to many practitioners, the descriptions of youth ministry grounded in practical theology seem neither practical (i.e. they are too complicated) nor theological (i.e. they do not reveal new aspects of the nature of God). Yet the conversation is healthy and continues as a collegial endeavor.

Where practical theology might function best is as the curricular

theory for an entire school or seminary. It seems that Ray Anderson may have been moving Fuller Theological Seminary in that direction before his death. In my opinion, the work of Kenda Creasy Dean and Richard Osmer at Princeton Theological Seminary provides a more functional curricular theory but without the integration with the whole seminary faculty. To expect youth ministry educators to be the researchers and theorists in each of the aspects of practical theology, however streamlined, seems to be a task that would only lessen the effectiveness of youth ministry education.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

It is quite possible that formal youth ministry education has come full circle. While built upon the existing theological traditions of the churches in which youth ministries are housed, youth ministry educators have once again come to a place where they must determine how the social sciences and theology relate to each other.

When the YMCA moved from the conservative social Gospel of the John R. Mott era to the liberal social Gospel of the post-World War I era, the YMCA quickly yielded its Christian roots, especially in the United States, and grounded its practice in the social sciences with few remnants of the supernatural. God stopped showing up (Setran, 2007, p. 245). In reaction to the influence of the liberal Social Gospel, fundamentalists at first hunkered down and rejected much of science and especially the social sciences. The Gospel was reduced to calls for conversion. The Gospel had very little “social” to it. Discipleship was more tied to personal pietism than matters of justice. Youth ministry, as much as any single factor, forced what came to be known as Evangelicalism to engage once again in the life of the mind and engage issues confronting people at risk in society.

Youth ministry educators in Christian colleges have become agents of integration bringing together theology and the social sciences. Unlike the first time around, youth ministry is engaged in a rigorous conversation that is seeking to understand both general revelation and special revelation as they play out in the lives of the nearly three billion people who are under the age of twenty. Confident that God is showing up, youth ministry educators are agents of redemption and societal change.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Campus Life Magazine citation appears to be an error.

<sup>2</sup> A good indication of the evangelical theology and pietism of parachurch groups is to survey the recommended readings in the “Discipleship” section (R1-1 - R1-10) of Leadership II: Foundations for Incarnational Youth Ministry (1991). Young Life: Institute of Youth Ministries/ Fuller Theological Seminary.

<sup>3</sup> While not explicitly about youth ministry, Richard Osmer's book, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, exemplifies the complexity of the task. While attempting to utilize his model of practical theology in three different contexts, he demonstrates just how hard it is to understand the cultural and religious traditions that shape a particular context.

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