

Emerging Adults, Emerging Worship

Young people and the future of the church

Todd Cioffi

Soul Searching

- National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)
 - 2002-2003: national, random survey of US households containing at least one teenager
 - 267 in-depth, face-to-face interviews
- Christian Smith (with Melinda Lundgquist Denton), *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*

Some Conclusions

- Religious Teenagers
 - Religious *practices* play an important role, not mainly cognitive belief
 - Habitual worship, reading scripture, praying regularly, practicing confession and forgiveness, engaging others in service, using one's body, religious music and art forms, and participating in religious education and formation
- More Conventional than We Might Think
 - “spiritual but not religious” doesn't necessarily apply
- Parents and Adults Play Important Role

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

- The de facto dominant “religion” among contemporary U.S. teenagers
 - God exists, created the world and watches over it
 - God wants people to be good, nice, and fair
 - Central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself
 - God gets involved in one’s life when a problem needs resolution
 - Good people go to heaven when they die
- Particularly evident among mainline Protestant and Catholic youth

Almost Christian

- Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*
- Teens – lack of robust faith?
 - Churches offer stripped-down version of Christianity
- Teens *have learned* from our churches
- Youth Groups – less important than we think
- Consequential faith: (1) families (2) congregations and (3) mentor relationships
- Four accents: (1) a creed to believe; (2) a community to belong to; (3) a call to live out; (4) a hope to hold on to

Getting Involved

- Religiosity correlates with organizational involvement
- Provide teens with *experiences* that cultivate leadership (observe, learn, practice)
 - Planning events
 - Leading a meeting on worship/help lead worship service
 - Intergenerational involvement

From *Almost* Christian to...

- Legitimate peripheral participation
 - The way newcomers become integrated into communities – namely, by *participating* in them
- Fake peripheral participation
 - Do youth activities truly prepare them for full participation?
 - For (a bad) example: Setting up chairs, one Youth Sunday a year, play games and call it “Christian fellowship”
 - Could worship carry on without youth? If so, that tells a congregation about **legitimate participation**

Souls in Transition

- Christian Smith (with Patricia Snell), *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*
- Emerging Adults
 - Not young adults, not late adolescence
 - 18 – 23/23 – 29
 - Macro social changes have combined to create a new phase in the American life course
 - Growth of higher education
 - Delay of marriage
 - Less stable careers, frequent job changes, new training (experimenting)
 - Parents extend financial and other support
 - Adulthood as “independence” and “identity”? Late 20s/early (late) 30s

Features of Emerging Adults

- Intense Identity Exploration
- Instability
- A focus on self
- Feeling in limbo, in transition, or in between
- A sense of possibilities and opportunities
- Unparalleled hope
- A sense of transience, confusion, anxiety, conflict
- Honor diversity, non-judgmental, keeping options open

Emerging Adults and Religion

- Emerging adults are much less religious than older adults (e.g., prayer, strong affiliation, religious service attendance, religious identity)
- But not necessarily more “secular” – remain interested in “religion” and “spiritual” matters
- 60% identify as religious
- General trend of disaffiliation from religious traditions (and denominations)
- Religious service attendance decreases
- *Not*, however, abandonment of faith

Emerging Adults and Keeping the Faith

- Factors that seem to predict “keeping the faith”:
 - Strong parental religious identity (word and deed)
 - Meaningful relationships with adults in a religious congregation
 - Personal prayer and reading scripture (“practicing” the faith)
 - Identity continuity – known to self and *others* (strong community)
 - Having many religious experiences
- Highlight: heightened enjoyment of religious congregational participation (adult connections)

Emerging Adults and Worship

- Meaningful relationships and identity continuity
 - Authenticity, community, “lived” Truth
- Kenda Dean
 - Churches – cultivate practices of Christian communities: worship, prayer, Scripture, fellowship, service, etc.
 - The primary “place” for this: worship and worship practices
 - Model: Eucharist
- Emphasis on Intergenerational Worship
 - Planning
 - Participation
 - Mentoring (relationships)