

A Cross National Analysis of Church Based Youth Ministries

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With youth ministry training events and degree programs sprouting on every continent, one can say that religious youth work (however it is defined) is a global phenomenon. This research seeks to provide a first ever international comparison continent by continent, of what constitutes normal church based youth ministries. Yes, we know Christian youth workers pray for their young people, hang out with them, and seek to enter the lives of youth in a cultural relevant manner. Beyond this, however, what do youth workers actually do? Three hundred youth workers representing 24 countries (and all continents) completed a web based survey. *Results will be discussed in terms of theology, sociology, and cultural studies.* Additionally, four hypothetical hunches are explored: 1) there is a broad similarity and the practice of youth ministry cross nationally, 2) that “traditional/family/clan based” cultures will place less emphasis on youth leadership than “western/individually based” cultures, 3) that churches which baptize infants will place less emphasis on outreach/evangelism than those that do not, and lastly, that the joys/frustrations of youth ministry will be similar world wide. The importance of such research is multidimensional. For the youth ministry academician, there is value in helping our own students understand the global nature of youth ministry and feel a part of a world wide Kingdom movement. For the youth ministry practitioner there is value in that much learning takes place as we “compare notes” with one another in the common cause of reaching youth. Additionally, knowledge about church youth groups moves forward the sociological understanding of an important component of youth religiosity.

INTRODUCTION

That the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry exists, and that this is its seventh biannual meeting reflects the globalization of the practice of youth ministry. The existence of IASYM reflects not only the global reality of youth ministry practitioners, but an increasingly developing academic and informational infrastructure supporting both the youth worker and the church seeking to facilitate religious youth work.¹

The practitioner of religious youth work relies (whether knowingly or unknowingly) on a knowledge base that is truly multidisciplinary: theology, psychology, anthropology, sociology as well as history. The individual who seeks to train practitioners and/or the academician who seeks to provide conceptualizations and vocabulary in understanding religious youth work also relies on these fields of study.

At the micro level the academic study of youth ministry has received significant attention. Examples in the US would include Mark Senter’s history of youth ministry² and the social science approach used in *Youth Ministry That Transforms*³ as well as The National Study of Youth and Religion from Smith and Denton⁴. Mentions of youth or

youth ministry can be found in the history of religious denominations⁵, the status or health of religious movements within a particular continent or country⁶ or even in biographies of visionary Christian leaders and missionaries⁷. Also at the micro level are national studies related to some aspect of religiosity, youth, and prosocial behavior.⁸ These, of course, are of keen interest to both academicians and practitioners.

At the macro level, cross national research and analysis of (essentially secular) subjects related to youth and of potential interest to youth workers is quite robust. One can find good data and analysis in cross national studies related to, for example, obesity⁹, homelessness¹⁰, and adolescent substance abuse¹¹. Additionally, the World Health Organization is a rich source for research of this sort.

Macro level cross national study of youth *ministry* or religious youth groups is, by contrast, virtually non existent. We do have the Princeton Project on Youth, Globalization and the Church. However the Princeton study does *not* engage in cross national comparisons of youth ministries, but rather it seeks to "...asses the impact of globalization on young people and to ascertain responses available to the 21st Century church.¹² The Princeton project is ongoing in Russia, India, Latin America, Germany, Japan and South Africa.

The purpose of this paper is to broaden the understanding of youth ministry through a cross national comparison of church based youth ministries. For the youth ministry academician, there is value in helping our own students understand the global nature of youth ministry and feel a part of a world wide Kingdom movement. There is value for the youth ministry practitioner in that much learning takes place as we "compare notes" with one another in the common cause of reaching youth. This is primarily research that is exploratory and descriptive in nature. However, I will also discuss the results in terms of some of the "ologies" of youth ministry: theology, anthropology (cultural studies), and sociology.

HYPOTHETICAL HUNCHES

Having just claimed that this paper is exploratory and descriptive, there are, however, four hunches which will be explored.

- 1) That there will be a broad similarity in the programmatic components of youth ministries around the globe.
- 2) The church-centered youth ministries in adult based (traditional) cultures will not feature students actually in leadership to the extent of church-centered youth ministries that are found in more progressive "western" cultures. They will be more adult led than student led.
- 3) That churches and denominations which baptize infants will place less emphasis on "outreach" or "youth evangelism" than churches and denominations that do not.
- 4) The joys and frustrations of church based youth ministry will be similar world wide.

DATA AND METHODS

The present research is based on a survey first developed in early 2006. Questions for the survey came from the author's Ph.D. dissertation (Fordham University, 1999) and additional research interests with this anticipated paper in mind. Selected US based colleagues were shown the preliminary survey and modifications were made based on their feedback. Concurrently, the services of surveymonkey.com were engaged. A test survey was done, on a different research interest, to gauge the utility of surveymonkey.com.

The names, locations, and email addresses of IASYM members were supplied by the IASYM Administrator. These addresses were sorted by continent and an "invitation for feedback" was extended in April to two IASYM members on each continent. After several follow up attempts, feedback on the survey was received from at least one person on each continent except India. IASYM member suggestions were incorporated, human subject protocol formalities were added, and the survey in its final form was launched in early July, right after the completion of the World Cup.

In this first wave, continent specific email invitations were transmitted. Since IASYM membership is not evenly spread throughout the world, there was some breaking out of certain countries from their continents. The final list of specific group emails included:

- Africa
- South Africa
- Australia/New Zealand
- South/Central America
- Asia
- India
- Continental Europe
- UK
- North America

For this research, then, the units of analysis are these nine continents or countries.

A month later a second wave invitation was sent to continents whose representation to date was minimal: first India, and South/Central America, then Africa, Asia, and Continental Europe. This second wave invitation was issued not from the authors' email address, but through a willing colleague in each of the 2nd wave continents. The number of responses improved accordingly. In both waves recipients were encouraged to forward the survey to other youth worker friends. This happened in every continent, particularly in Australia/New Zealand as well as the country of the UK.

An informal “third wave” occurred in mid-August/September as the author sought additional sources for youth worker contacts. The survey was considered “closed” on 15 October so analysis could be made in anticipation of the Cambridge conference (which had a deadline of mid November for plenary papers). At survey closing, a total of 303 survey responses were received from 25 countries.

The data from the survey is obviously limited, in that it can not be said to be absolutely representative of a whole country or continent. No governmental or religious body keeps a “master list” of youth workers, so a truly randomized stratified sample, normal in sociological research, is impossible. Many denominations know who their youth workers are in a particular country, but many others do not track this information. So then, survey results are only generalizable to the respondents, yet this first attempt at cross national youth ministry research is at least a small step.

Of tangential interest is the number of IASYM members per continent and the number of responses from each continent. In cases where the total number of responses is more than the IASYM response, the survey was forwarded by IASYM members or youth workers were recruited by other means. When looking at the results of any of the tables below remember that not every respondent (of the 303) answered each question. This is why the “N” (number of responses to the question) is usually lower than 303.

TABLE 1 (Q31) IASYM Membership by Continent/Country, Total Responses by October 15. N=244

| | IASYM Members | IASYM Respondents | Total Survey Responses Q31 |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Africa | 6 | 6 | 9 |
| South Africa | 63 | 4 | 11 |
| Australia/New Zealand | 32 | 5 | 66 |
| South/Central America | 6 | 1 | 4 |
| Asia | 6 | 3 | 24 |
| India | 22 | 1 | 5 |
| Continental Europe | 20 | 3 | 9 |
| UK | 77 | 10 | 20 |
| North America | | 5 | 76 |

RESULTS & DISUCSSION

Results will be discussed in references to the four hypotheses of the researcher. Conceptual clarity and analysis stemming from theological, sociological, and anthropological insights will be integral to this discussion.

Hypotheses #1: 1) That there will be a broad similarity in the programmatic components of youth ministries around the globe.

Here we arrive at a subject of interest to sociologists. If the religious youth *group* is the unit of analysis, sociological interest focuses on, for example, the youth group as an organization, which means, then, it is a *system*¹³. And sociologists love systems! As a system, any group or organization can be said to have a certain *ecology*.¹⁴ The tables in this study are one way to understand a youth group from the standpoint of human ecology. The classical sociological theorist Max Weber gave considerable attention to organizations, analyzing them in terms of structure, function, internal reward, and the role of leadership.¹⁵ Though of interest, further analysis in these terms is not the central focus of this paper.¹⁶

If the individual young person is the unit of analysis, by contrast, sociologists don't much care about the youth group as an organization or if X percentage of youth attend a youth group meeting compared (or in addition to) a student led cell group. *It is that they attend at all is what is so interesting.* Why do they attend? What is the self perceived benefit a young person derives? Are there any benefits that are not self perceived, to society, for example?

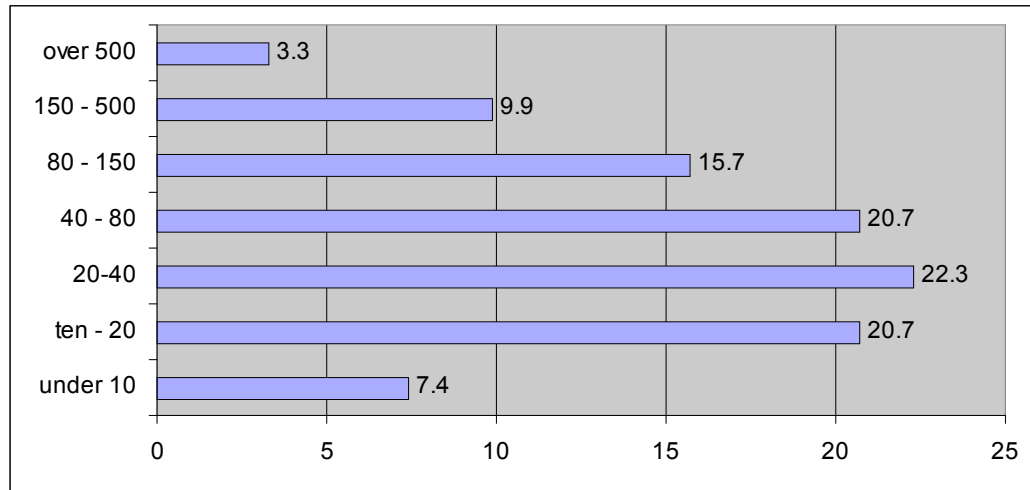
This, of course, connects to the virtual revolution in sociology departments around the globe begun by Leslie Francis in Wales.¹⁷ In short, Leslie Francis, in his study of UK young people, found that youth who were high in religiosity (and youth group attendance being a component of religiosity) have *assets* their less religious peers do not have. Said another way, religiosity in youth makes a difference in lives and that this difference is important for the maintenance of a civil society¹⁸. This religiosity-prosocial behavior linkage, is completely contrary to sociology's Founding Fathers Karl Marx and Emil Durkheim's negative assessment of religion.¹⁹ It is enough to make senior tenured sociologists go to the nearest Starbucks (or pub) with their colleagues and remember the good old days when it was fashionable to disparage religious faith and expression.

Sociologists have extended and deepened this analysis beyond connecting religiosity with the presence or absence of certain behaviors. An example of one such extension, very germane when thinking about young people in youth groups, would be the social capital conceptualizations developed by theorists Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman²⁰. Like money in the bank that can be withdrawn and used for a variety of purposes youth gain *social* capital in their interaction with peers and adult youth leaders.

From a sociological point of view, then, youth groups themselves are interesting (as, for example, ecological systems), as well in that they are generators of high religiosity (which, results in good for society). So what does this study reveal about youth groups?

Before considering comparison of specific program features, how many youth are involved in the groups represented in the survey?

Table 2 (Q15) How Many Youth Are Regularly Involved in Your Ministry?
(Figure on right is percent of total respondent who answered with this size. N=242)



Among the respondents, were there any difference according to Continent?

Table 3 (Q15) Number of Youth Involved on a Regular Basis, Modal Responses, By Continent/Country N=259

| S | | | | | | | S/C | Modal | |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| Africa | Africa | Aus/NZ | India | Asia | Europe | UK | Am | of all | |
| ten - 20 | ten - 20 | ten - 20 | under 10 | 40 - 80 | ten -20 | 80 - 150 | 40 -80 | 80 - 150 | 20- 40 |

It is interesting to note here that in four of the nine continent/countries more than 40 youth are involved regularly. This, of course, has implications for trainers of youth workers. The larger the group, the greater the importance of team ministry. Skill of recruitment, training, and supporting other workers are quite different than the skills needed only to work with youth themselves.

With the basic attendance demographic in mind, then, I now turn to the first hypothesis...that there will be a broad similarity in the programmatic features around the world.

One could argue that this hypothesis seems logically true in that presumably all Christian youth workers see Bible as important for their own lives and for ministry. It makes sense, then, that certain common expressions of this biblical basis would immerge. One could also argue that in the internet age many resources are available globally, and thus available to all. Additionally would expect that since most full time paid youth workers reside in North America and that publishing youth ministries resources on that Continent

is extremely robust, some of these resources would be used and adapted globally. Many of these publishers also have “gone global” so again, another reason for international similarity in how youth ministry is operationalized at the local level.

We can test one link in this conceptual flow by looking at Question 26.

Table 4 (Q26) Of Each Continent’s Respondents, What Percentage Named a North American Youth Ministry Resource as a Favorite? N= 198

| | Africa | S. Africa | Aus/NZ | India | Asia | Cont. Europe | UK | S/C Am |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|------|--------------|----|--------|
| Named a N.Am. Resource as “Favorite” | 50% | 40% | 30% | 0% | 62% | 16% | 9% | 0% |

The most often named of those who used a N. American resource were Youth Specialties, Group, and Doug Fields’ *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*. Those from Australia/New Zealand and the United Kingdom were obviously in their responses very appreciative of the rich resources available produced by people from their own countries. In Australia/New Zealand Ken Moser was an often mentioned name, as well as the Katoomba Youth Leadership Conference. In the UK the Youthwork magazine and website was the most often mentioned, by far. As for Asia’s high regard of North American resources, most of the responses came from the Philippines. The most influential graduate level youth ministry training in the Philippines (if not all of Asia) is the Alliance Graduate School in Manila. Their youth ministry Masters degree “imports” many U.S. youth ministry professors on a rotating basis to teach.

Having said this, what similarities and differences do we see in various categories of youth ministry?²¹

Table 4: Programs/Events for SPIRITUAL GROWTH: Percent Using Each Component N=269

| | Africa | S Africa | Aus/NZ | India | Asia | Europe | UK | S/C Am | N Am | Mean % of All Responses |
|-------------------|--------|----------|--------|-------|------|--------|----|--------|------|-------------------------|
| Wkly meeting | 75 | 91 | 71 | 100 | 43 | 43 | 57 | 83 | 70 | 67 |
| Sunday school | 25 | 25 | 40 | 0 | 44 | 21 | 26 | 17 | 55 | 40 |
| Small groups | 33 | 50 | 68 | 25 | 53 | 43 | 69 | 17 | 66 | 60 |
| Discipleship grps | 25 | 25 | 43 | 25 | 75 | 7 | 35 | 67 | 34 | 40 |
| Confirm./catech. | 8 | 25 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 42 | 39 | 0 | 24 | 21 |
| Other | 17 | 8 | 21 | 25 | 18 | 11 | 27 | 33 | 11 | 17 |

To foster spiritual growth the majority of respondents, except those from Asia and Continental Europe used a weekly youth group meeting. Indeed, it is easy to imagine that when you workers gather, wherever they may be, a topic of discussion will eventual become the comparing of notes related to the actual features of this weekly meeting. Producers of youth ministry resources are aware of this, apparently, and provide abundant curriculum options for youth workers in this regard.²² Of course the subject of spiritual growth, also popularly called *spiritual formation*, is a deep and rich topic generating much academic and practitioner interest.²³

The next most used venue for spiritual growth is that of small groups. If one considers the probability that discipleship groups are also likely to be small groups, we can see that more than half the respondents in each continent/country had some kind of small grouping for the purpose of spiritual growth. (For clarity in later analysis small groups and discipleship groups will be considered as one program feature.)

A typical youth ministry, however, involves not only spiritual growth, but social interaction, enjoyment of peers, and the inclusion of friends outside the groups.

Table 5: Programs/Events for FELLOWSHIP, OUTREACH, OR EVANGELISM
(Percent using this program component.) N=263 (Percent using each component.)

| | Africa | S Africa | Aus/NZ | India | Asia | Europe | UK | S/C Am | N Am | Tot % |
|----------------------------------|--------|----------|--------|-------|------|--------|----|--------|------|-------|
| Youth centre | 18 | 25 | 25 | 0 | 45 | 28 | 36 | 20 | 30 | 28 |
| Coffee house/club | 0 | 25 | 6 | 25 | 21 | 28 | 24 | 20 | 13 | 15 |
| Youth Alpha | 18 | 8 | 13 | 0 | 10 | 14 | 30 | 20 | 1 | 11 |
| Camps/Retreats | 64 | 59 | 65 | 0 | 72 | 71 | 79 | 20 | 61 | 65 |
| Christian concert | 36 | 42 | 20 | 0 | 38 | 21 | 24 | 20 | 30 | 28 |
| Sports Teams | 18 | 8 | 7 | 0 | 21 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 11 | 10 |
| Attend Sport ev. | 27 | 8 | 10 | 0 | 14 | 14 | 3 | 20 | 34 | 18 |
| Outreach event At your church | 54 | 50 | 60 | 75 | 69 | 64 | 33 | 60 | 80 | 64 |
| Other | 9 | 17 | 23 | 25 | 14 | 21 | 33 | 40 | 13 | 19 |

There are several way to consider the findings of Table 5. The greatest commonality is that of camps and retreats.²⁴ Only in India and South/Central America did less than half the respondents list this as part of their youth ministry. The other very common fellowship/outreach program is to host some kind of event at the church building, to which friends are invited.

Though not nearly as pervasive as retreats and outreach programs events at church, youth centers, be they storefronts in Metro Manila or a designated and decorated areas within an existing 200 year old church building (as in Bournemouth, England) are popular. In countries where the “coffee scene” or “club scene” is a feature of young adult social activity, we find youth ministries seeking to build bridges by using these “scenes”. Naming one or both of the youth center or coffee house usages are: Continental Europe (56%), the UK (60%), Asia (61%) and South Africa (50%).

Table 6: (Q12) Programs/Events for SERVICE OR MINISTRY (Percent using each component.) N=246

| | Africa | S Africa | Aus/NZ | India | Asia | Europe | UK | S/C Am | N Am | Tot % |
|--|--------|----------|--------|-------|------|--------|----|--------|------|-------|
| Choir, band, or rap group | 64 | 72 | 38 | 0 | 62 | 53 | 54 | 25 | 47 | 49 |
| Dance group | 34 | 18 | 5 | 0 | 36 | 7 | 11 | 0 | 5 | 10 |
| Visit sick, orphans | 27 | 45 | 10 | 50 | 17 | 23 | 14 | 75 | 17 | 19 |
| Service project (food/clothing to the poor) | 45 | 36 | 59 | 0 | 45 | 54 | 57 | 75 | 91 | 67 |
| Missions trip. | 36 | 27 | 34 | 50 | 38 | 23 | 42 | 25 | 75 | 48 |
| Help your church by cleaning or visiting elderly | 64 | 16 | 50 | 0 | 35 | 53 | 25 | 50 | 63 | 49 |
| Other | 9 | 9 | 13 | 25 | 28 | 12 | 35 | 25 | 5 | 15 |

A balanced church based youth ministry often has an additional broad component of ministry beyond spiritual growth and beyond fellowship or outreach. Youth groups typically attempt in some way to get youth involved in doing something beyond themselves: some kind of service or social action. The choices given on the survey can be further grouped for clarity broader categories: 1) service/ministry having to do with *music*, 2) service or ministry having to do with *the needy*.

A youth choir, youth band, rap group or dance group is a ministry service option in 50% or more of the Continents/countries: Africa (98%), South Africa (90%) Asia (98%) (C. Europe (60%) the UK (65%) and North America (52%).²⁵ Reaching out to the needy (food/clothing to poor, visiting sick, orphans) was a feature of more than fifty percent of all respondents from all continent/countries. At least a quarter of all youth ministries in the survey responses from everywhere but Continental Europe were involved in mission trips.

Scanning the results in Tables 4, 5, and 6 can we make a determination on hypothetical hunch #1? Cross nationally, is there a broad similarity in programmatic components of youth ministry? One can immediately be impressed by some similarities and also wide diversity. Another way to distill the data is to frame the question in a different way. In regard to what program components did the majority of continents/countries indicate that a majority of the respondents use that program component?

Table 7 What Are the Program Features Most Used Globally?

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Prog. Feature Used by the majority in the Nine Cont./Countries | |
| Nine of Nine | ministry to the needy |
| Eight of Nine | small groups |
| | outreach events at church |
| Seven of Nine | weekly youth group meeting |
| | camp/retreats |
| Six of Nine | some kind of music ministry |
| Five of Nine | helping church body |

Around the world, the survey respondents reflect broad similarities in the widespread usage of seven programs of the fifteen surveyed. Though in different languages and cultural settings, most of the respondents would nevertheless be “speaking the same language” when talking with each other about these youth ministry programs.

Another way to get at the same question is to consider the dispersion and significant differences in youth ministry programs as well. North America is different, programmatically, for example, from the rest of the world in two respects. Mission trips were named in 75% of the survey responses, far above the rate in other places. Similarly, Sunday School is used by 55% of the ministries, far above any others. Other examples can be seen in Table 8. (India and South/Central America, with so few responses, 5 and 6 respectively, are not included in this table.)

Table 8 Programmatic Difference: Specific Continents/Countries Where a Programmatic Feature is 20% or More Varied from the Mean of All.

| Cont./Countries Whose Program Usage > 20% Different Than Mean of All | Programmatic Feature | Mean for All | Percent in This C/C |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Continental Europe | Confirmation/Catechism | 21% | 42% |
| UK | Youth Alpha | 11% | 33% |
| UK | Outreach Event at Church | 64% | 29% |
| South Africa | Visit sick, orphans | 19% | 45% |
| South Africa | Missions Trips | 48% | 27% |
| Continental Europe | Missions Trips | 48% | 23% |
| South Africa | Help Church (cleaning, visit elderly) | 49% | 18% |
| UK | Help Church (cleaning, visit elderly) | 49% | 27% |

Hypothesis #2 Adult based (traditional) cultures will spawn youth ministries that involve less youth actually leading their groups compared to youth based (“western”) cultures.

Here we are at the heart of the cultural studies aspect of this research. Cultural studies is a major industry in academia, with journals, books, and conferences galore. A core assumption among researchers is that “national cultures” can be scaled and measured and that societies do vary with respect to cultural dimensions²⁶ Of course this is much easier said than done, and there are those who question the whole notion of national identity²⁷ Despite detractors, cultural dimensions theory is quite robust. One popular perspective is the comparison of cultures with respect to the dimensions of universalism vs. particularism, individualism vs. communitarianism, specific vs. diffuse, affective vs. neutral, achievement vs. ascription, sequential vs. synchronic, and internal vs. external control.²⁸

The most cited cultural dimensions theory is that of Geert Hofstede²⁹ of the Netherlands, who posits five dimensions of difference between national cultures:

- 1) power distance (the degree of inequality among people considered to be normal)
- 2) individualism vs. collectivism (to what degree it is assumed families, clans, and organizations will care for members)
- 3) masculinity vs. femininity (dominance/assertiveness and acquisition as compared to relationships and quality of life)
- 4) uncertainty avoidance (preference for structured or unstructured situations)
- 5) long term vs. short term orientation (values oriented toward the future or toward the now and fulfilling social obligations).

Germane to Hypothesis #2 would be the expectations that cultures which emphasized the collective as opposed to the individual and the fulfilling of social obligations (Hofstede’s dimensions numbers two and five) would be more adult oriented than youth oriented. Additionally applicable to youth ministry and “youth leadership” would be cultural response style studies³⁰ and lifestyle comparisons.³¹ Another way to conceptualize the difference is to think of those cultures which grew out of Greek philosophy and society. Here the founding notions of “western” society in emphasis on freedom and the importance of the individual were born. The Enlightenment in Europe in the Middle Ages also, of course, profoundly influenced these same “western” societies.

In terms of the continents/countries represented in this research, “western” societies will be considered to be N. America, the UK, Continental Europe, South Africa, and Australia/New Zealand. “Traditional” societies will be considered to be South/Central America, India, and Asia, and Africa. Though of course it is a broad generalization to say so, traditional societies tend toward being adult and group/communally centered,

while western societies tend toward being centered on the individual and do not place the same emphasis on family/group and honoring elders.

Cultural dimension theory would suggest, then, that traditional cultures would place less emphasis on youth leadership than western cultures. Does the research bare this out?

Survey questions 13 and 18 are telling. First, let us look at the raw results.

Table 9: Percent of youth groups with some kind of youth leadership structure (Q13) N=209

| | Africa | S Africa | Aus/NZ | India | Asia | Europe | UK | S/C Am | N Am | Tot % |
|--|--------|----------|--------|-------|------|--------|----|--------|------|-------|
| Leadership Team, Yth Counsel, Officers | 67 | 100 | 57 | 50 | 61 | 50 | 36 | 33 | 50 | 58 |
| Student led cell groups | 11 | 11 | 41 | 50 | 60 | 25 | 45 | 67 | 24 | 35 |
| Student led Bible clubs at school | 33 | 0 | 31 | 25 | 36 | 25 | 45 | 33 | 21 | 28 |
| Student led media/drama/artistic or music grps | 44 | 11 | 34 | 0 | 43 | 62 | 55 | 67 | 51 | 43 |

Except in South/Central America, the majority of the youth ministries represented had some kind of student leadership structure. However, in the case of South Central America, they did use student led cell groups (as did Asia and the UK). About a third of the youth ministries used students to lead Bible or Christian clubs at school, except in South Africa where none did. The majority of youth ministries in C.Europe, the UK, South/Central America, and North America used students to head up some aspect of music or media.

In my 1999 Ph.D. dissertation on youth group numerical growth in the US, one variable that strongly correlated (positively) with growth was the percent of time during the groups' main meeting youth themselves were actually up front leading. In Table 10 we see that the majority of youth ministries in the survey had youth in front leading less than 25% of the time. There is considerable variation cross nationally.

Table 10 Percent of time in typical meeting youth are in front leading the meeting (Q18) N=243 (Percent of responses in of the 4 categories for each Cont/Country.)

| | Africa | S Africa | Aus/NZ | India | Asia | Europe | UK | S/C Am | N Am | Tot % |
|----------|--------|----------|--------|-------|------|--------|----|--------|------|-------|
| 0% | 9 | 0 | 13 | - | 4 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 10 | 10 |
| 1-25% | 9 | 50 | 58 | - | 19 | 67 | 51 | 33 | 64 | 52 |
| 25-50% | 45 | 42 | 18 | - | 26 | 0 | 29 | 17 | 22 | 23 |
| Over 50% | 36 | 8 | 13 | - | 56 | 33 | 18 | 50 | 4 | 17 |

With respect to the specifics of Hypothesis #2, that adult/family/clan based (traditional) cultures will spawn youth ministries that involve less youth actually leading their groups compared to youth/individual based ("western") cultures, Table 11 supplies an answer.

Table 11 Youth Leadership and Traditional vs. Western Cultures

| | Traditional | Western |
|---------------------|-------------|---------|
| Percent of Mtg Time | | |
| Student Leading | 43% | 26% |
| Have St. Leadership | 53% | 60% |

Contrary to theoretical expectation, the youth ministries represented in the survey from traditional cultures (Africa, India, S/Central America, and Asia) have youth considerably more involved in leading meetings and events. The actual percentage of youth ministries having some kind of student leadership structure is nearly the same in both traditional and western cultures. Perhaps the traditional culture youth ministries are in churches whose vast majority of adults (being in a traditional culture) do not value youth ministry, and therefore youth must do it themselves. Further study can profitably be done on this issue.

Hypothesis #3 That churches and denominations which baptize infants will place less emphasis on “outreach” or “youth evangelism” than churches and denominations that do not.

Here we have the most obvious question on the survey directly and explicitly related to theology. “Does your church/denomination baptize infants?” (Q7) Religious denominations that practice infant baptism/confirmation (or catechism), understand their youth are already saved and part of the faith community. They may not be, therefore, as motivated to make sure youth ministry programs are attractive, innovative, and contain enough “entry level” activities and teaching. If the youth group is in a social context in which the vast majority of youth are from similar religious backgrounds, having evangelistic programs may seem pointless, since attracting a new youth to one’s youth group is, in a sense, like stealing. The young person is already saved, and part of a faith community...why try to attract and have them switch? (Religious switching is a huge interest of sociological inquiry, well beyond the scope of this paper.)

Survey responses indicated that in regard to most of the questions on the survey, there were no appreciable differences correlated to the yes/no respondents related to infant baptism. There were, however, four items on the survey in which this infant baptism yes/no question revealed substantial differences.

Table 12 Youth Ministries Within Churches/Denominations Which Practice Infant Baptism Compared to Those That Do Not N=298 (173 baptize infants, 129 do not)

| | Baptize Infants | Do Not Baptize Infants |
|--|-----------------|------------------------|
| Size of Group: Percent Indicating 150-500 or > 500 | 38% | 62% |
| Having Outreach Events 1-4 Times A Month | 47% | 69% |
| Youth Leading More than 50% of Meeting | 36% | 45% |
| Have a Mission/Vision/Core Values Statement | 64% | 87% |

We can see then, when taken as a whole, there were several dimensions of difference resulting from the “waters that divide” Christendom³². Youth groups from churches/denominations in which infant Baptism is practiced are, compared to those that do not practice infant baptism are

- 1) Are not as large (Q15)
- 2) Less likely to have frequent outreach programs (Q17)
- 3) Less likely to have students up front leading their meetings (Q18).
- 4) Less likely to have a mission/vision/core values statement (Q20).

Though this is not a cross national comparison, it is the first attempt that this researcher could find anywhere in which the praxical implications of theological differences are specifically explored in an academic context related to youth ministry.³³

Hypothesis #4 The joys and frustrations of church based youth ministry will be similar world wide.

Happily, the vast majority of respondents felt supported by their pastors and the people of their church.

Table 13 (Q23,24) Sense of Support Percent Felt Supported By... N=291

| | S | | | | | | | | N | Tot % |
|--------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|--------|-----|--------|-----|-------|
| | Africa | Africa | Aus/NZ | India | Asia | Europe | UK | S/C Am | Am | Tot % |
| Pastor | 78% | 82% | 85% | 33% | 85% | 83% | 66% | 80% | 77% | 78% |
| Congregation | 56% | 54% | 66% | 33% | 52% | 83% | 59% | 60% | 68% | 64% |

At least pastors, it seems, recognize the importance of youth ministry in the church and are supportive of the youth worker. Most pastors want church families to feel cared for. A dynamic youth ministry certainly helps with congregant satisfaction so it makes intuitive sense that a pastor would want to support the youth worker. Of the survey's

total responses, 47% are full time youth pastors, 18% part time, 25% are volunteers, and 10% indicated “other”. The importance of a good youth worker/pastor relationship is hard to overstate but the topic is outside the purpose of this study.³⁴

Quite startling, however, is the gap, in six of the nine Continents/countries between the youth worker’s sense of pastoral support and the youth workers sense of support from the congregation. This would be a fruitful field for further research. The topic should certainly come up in youth ministry training. It is very easy for particularly a young youth worker to alienate the parents and other adults in his/her church.³⁵ Of the total survey responses, 26% were under the age of 25. A cross tabulation of the data revealed that these young youth workers did enjoy the support of their pastors (84%) and, happily, 72% felt supported by their congregations.

As for specific joys and frustrations of youth ministry, over 70% of the respondents chose to answer survey questions 27 and 28. The lists were almost identical from each Continent/country with respect to both joys and frustrations. Here are some of the responses in their own voices.

Joys of Youth Ministry

Africa: Seeing youth “get it”. Worshipping with youth.
 South Africa: Youth on fire for God! Authentic worship.
 Australia/New Zealand: Personal relationships with youth. Youth being passionate for God.
 India: Doing youth conferences. Affirming youth when they do right.
 Asia: Spending time with youth. Watching youth worship.
 Continental Europe: Seeing answered prayer. Being part of a team.
 UK: Seeing youth mature in Christ. Developing leaders.
 South/Central America: Seeing youth delight in God. Worshipping with youth.
 North America: Seeing youth embrace spirituality. Helping volunteers grow in ministry.

Frustrations and Sorrows of Youth Ministry

(All Continent/countries mentioned lack of money except India.)
 Africa: Arrogant youth. When a young person who I’ve disciplined turns away.
 South Africa: Church conflict. Adults not valuing youth.
 Australia/New Zealand: The view that YM is just keeping kids “safe” and attending mass. Youth dropping out at age 18.
 India: Some see youth ministry as “lesser” form of ministry. Criticism (from adults) when I use movie clips in my teaching.
 Asia: Church bureaucracy!!! Time pressures.
 Continental Europe: Youth choosing sports and music over church involvement. Old people don’t understand the needs of youth.
 UK: Lack of church’s willingness to change. Not enough time to do the ministry and have a good family.
 South/Central America: Lack of facilities for our meetings. Seeing youth turn away that I’ve prayed for and spent time with.
 North America: Inconsistent attendance. Lack of volunteers.

The hypothetical hunch number 4, that the joys and sorrows of youth ministry will be similar around the world, is amply illustrated here. Every single comment, whether positive or negative, could be empathetically understood by each other person who completed the survey.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of Hypothesis #4 is a good place to begin when thinking about conclusions. Youth ministry is, indeed, a world wide expression of what God is doing. As a youth worker it is easy to think we are alone, particularly when things go wrong. It is an encouragement to know that we are part of a world wide community, experiencing and overcoming the typical frustrations and obstacles of youth ministry.

Regarding the other hypothetical hunches, the first (programmatic similarity) was substantiated, though weakly. One could just as easily emphasize the diversity. The second hunch, (traditional vs western culture and the place of youth leadership) was soundly refuted. The third hypothesis (infant baptizing churches will program less evangelism/outreach) was supported.

The practitioner, seeing specific results, may be motivated to try something he or she sees other youth worker doing in other countries. For example, to the one who has never thought of giving young people more leadership “up front” in meetings would quickly see here that this is a big deal in much of the world.

The youth ministry academician or denominational leader may find many possible avenues of further study. For example, leaders in South Africa may wonder and explore why youth ministries from their country seem so much less likely to engage in things that help the church, such as visiting elderly members or doing simple tasks around the church building. Of course these same leaders will, quite properly, seek to study youth ministries in their own country more completely to get a more accurate picture of youth ministry.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

One of the most obvious needs for further research is to do the survey again and seek to gain a statistically significant percentage response in each Continent or country. While probably not possible when considering “all” youth ministries, it may be possible within specific denominations which have a world wide reach to compare country by country and Continent by Continent. Other ways to narrow the focus would be to do cross national comparisons country by country *within* a particular Continent. Or, a focus could be on explicitly urban youth ministries. Wouldn't it be interesting to gain information from ten youth ministries in each of the world's 20 most populist urban centers.

The concept of the research could certainly be taken to a higher level in terms of research sophistication. This study has only been descriptive. Future studies could focus on specific change over time and various methods of formal statistical analysis and statistical modeling could be used. For example, the “support gap” felt by many youth workers

in many places would be an interesting study. What variables correlate with this sense of congregational support or lack of it? What are the features of a congregation whose tenor and tone is youth-ministry friendly? Are there case studies in which this sense of support has changed from negative to positive? Is there something youth ministries in Asia, for example, could learn from youth ministries in the UK where there is no gap whatsoever? (See Table 13)

ENDNOTES

¹ However, the “rise of youth ministry” or “religious youth work ” has not yet appeared on the radar of those writing in the field of new religious movements or more recent conceptualizations of classic religious movement theory. For example, Lynn Bridgers’ *Contemporary Varieties of Religious Experience: James’ Classic Study in Light of Resiliency, Temperament, and Trama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) had ample opportunity to nuance particularly her concept of resiliency if she had considered religious youth group’s role in this phenomena. Similarly, in Peter Clarke *New Religions in Global Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006) and Eileen Baker’s *New Religious Movements* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1989) it is as if people who are not adults do not exist. Clark has one sentence on German Youth Religions (p.51) and Baker only mentions children in reference to the offspring of adult cult members, such as the Children of God.

² Mark Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry*, (Colorado Spring: Cook Communications, 1992).

³ Merton Strommen, Karen Jones and David Rahn, *Youth Ministry That Transforms*, (El Cajon CA: Youth Specialties, 2001).

⁴ Christian Smith and Melinda Denton *Soul Searching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵ William H. Swatos Jr. Ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, (Lanham, MD, 1998) For example see its entry on Methodism.

⁶ David Voas, “Religion in Britain, Neither Beliving nor Belonging,” *Sociology*, Vol 39:1 2005 11-18 or Valerie King, Glen Hlder Jr., and Les Whitbeck, “Religious Involvement Among Rural Youth: An Ecological and Life Course Perspective,” *Journal of Adolescence*. Vol. 7:4, 1997 . 431-456. “Kevin Ward, Is New Zealand’s Future Churchless?” *Stimulus* Vol 12:2 2004 2-10.

⁷ For example, United Methodist missionary Dr. Catherine Mudime Akale’s work with youth and children in Camaroon, Africa <http://new.gbgmumc.org/work/missionaries/biographies/index.cfm?action=details&id=7>

⁸ For example, the link between high religiosity and lower pre-marital sex in South Africa and Australia in Richard Ferhring, et.al, “Religiosity and Sexual Activity Among Older Adolescents,” *Journal of Religion and Health*. 1998 Vol 37 (3), 229; or in Hungary with substance abuse, B Piko and K. Fitzpatrick, “Substance Use, Religiosity, and Other Protective Factors Among Hungarian Adolescents,” Vol 29(6) 2004, 1095; or in Sweden with social bonding in Pehr Granqvist’s “Attachment and Religiosity in Adolescents: Cross Sectional and Longitudinal Evaluations,” *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin* Vol. 28 2003,260-270.

⁹I. Janssen, et al. “Comparison of Overweight and Obesity Prevalence in School Age Youth From 34 Countries and Their Relationships With Physical Activity and Dietary Patterns,” *Obesity Reviews* Vol. 6(2) 2005, 123-132.

¹⁰ N. Milburn et al. “Cross-National Variations in Behavior Profiles Among Homeless Youth,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* Vol. 37(1) 2006, 63-76.

¹¹ J. Beyers, et al. “A Cross National Comparison of Risk and Protective Factors for Adolescent Substance Use: the United States and Australia” *Journal of Adolescent Health* Vol. 35(1) 2004, 3-16.

¹² Princeton Project on Youth, Globalization and the Church.

http://www.ptsem.edu/iym/research/Globalization_project/

¹³ Michael Beer, *Organizational Change and Development*, (Santa Monica CA: Goodyear, 1980).

¹⁴ Michael Hannan and John Freeman, *Organizational Ecology*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

¹⁵ Max Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, (New York: Free Press, 1964).

¹⁶ Those who are interested in conceptualizing youth groups in this vocabulary will profit from a couple of other foundational works. See Wendell French and Cecil Bell Jr.’s *Organizational Development: Behavioral Science Interventions for Organization Improvement*, (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice Hall,

1984) as well as Stanley Seashore, et al., *Assessing Organizational Change*, (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1983)

¹⁷Leslie Francis, ed. *Fast Moving Currents in Youth Culture*, (Oxford: Lynx, 1995). Though not an academic text, the scope of his research findings published here are of interest to both the youth ministry practitioner and the academician. Dr. Francis presented his finding at the first IASYM conference in January 1995. Those of us in attendance then did not know it, but we were watching history being made.

¹⁸There are now hundreds of studies, around the globe, demonstrating the religiosity/asset link. For example, in South Africa youth high in religiosity were shown to be less involved in pre-marital sex than their peers according to L. Nicholas's "The Association Between Religiosity, Sexual Fantasy, Participation in Sexual Acts, Sexual Enjoyment, Exposure, and Reaction to Sexual Materials Among Black South African Youth" *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* Vol 30, 2004, 37-42.

¹⁹Karl Marx, *Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegels Philosophy of Right*. (Germany: Deutsch-Franzosische Jahrbucher (1944). See also Emil Durkheim's *Moral Education* (New York, Free Press, 1947). More anti religious invective can be found in psychologist Sigmund Frued's *The Future of an Illusion*, (New York: Norton, 1994, paperback edition).

²⁰Pierre Bordieu, "The Forms of Capital" in Jay Richardson, ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, (New York, Greenwood Press, 1983). James Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital" *Journal of Sociology* Vol. 94, 1988, 94-120.

²¹As you see, I group different youth ministry programmatic components using a certain rubric. This rubric: Spiritual Growth, Outreach/Fellowship/Evangelism, and Service/Ministry is adapted from the writings of Sonlife. This organization serves world wide to promote "Great Commission/Great Commandment" youth ministry. See Sonlife.com.

²²UK youth workers are well familiar with *Youthwork* and its inclusion of some weekly meeting guides. In the US *Group* also gives sample outlines of youth group meetings.

²³For example see Sheryl Kujawa's "Courage and Resistance: spiritual formation and mentoring girls for religious leadership" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* Vol. 6 (3) 2001. pp. 299-310. Or Daniel Scott's "Rights of Passage in Adolescent Development" *Child and Youth Care Forum* Vol 27 (5) 2001, 317-335. Examples of book length discussion of this important topic include the recent work by Mike King *Presence Centered Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, Intervarsity 2006) and the still very relevant *The God Bearing Life* by Kenda Creasy Dean (Upper Room Books, 1998).

²⁴Amazing energy and creativity goes into camps and retreats around the world. For example, Gerard in the Philippines, with others, host a "Mountain Challenge" retreat in which youth in teams, over a two day period, ascend a mountain (of several thousand feet) , going from clue to clue. At each clue point a certain aspect of the Gospel is presented. At the top, the Gospel story is completed and youth are given a chance to respond. The remainder of the camp (at base camp down below) is devoted to discipleship and spiritual growth. Olutuasu, in Nigeria, hosts an internet camp in the rural countryside. He obtains a generator, a dozen computers, arranges for satellite access to the internet, and gives the 100 youth who attend introductory and intermediate training on computer use, with special emphasis on the internet. He finds most youth who attend respond to the Gospel invitation.

²⁵This is not to say that youth worship isn't a feature in a majority of youth ministries everywhere. Remember the issue here is music as an venue for serving or ministering to others.

²⁶William Newburry and Nevena Yakova, "Standardization Preferences: A function of National Culture, Work Interdependence and Local Embeddedness," *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology* Vol 37 (1) 2006, 44-60.

²⁷Steven Heine et al., "What's Wrong With Cross Cultural Comparisons of Subjective Likert Scales?: The Reference Group Effect," *Journal of Personality and Psychology* Vol 82 (6) 2002, 903-918; Nancy Alder and John Graham, "Cross-Cultural Interaction: The International Comparison Fallacy?" *Journal of International Business Studies* Vol 20 1989.

²⁸F. Trompenaars, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*. (London: Irwin Press, 1994)

²⁹Geert Hofstede, *Culture and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004)

³⁰Timothy Johnson et al., "The Relation Between Culture and Response," *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, Vol 36(2) 2005, 264-277.

³¹ Sakari Karvonen, et al., “Lifestyle, Social Class, and Health Related Behavior: A Cross Cultural Comparison of 15 Year Olds in Glasgow and Helsinki” *Journal of Youth Studies* Vol 4 (4) 2001, 393-413.

³² A classic treatment of the infant baptism vs non infant baptism debate is Donald Bridge’s *The Waters That Divide* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1977).

³³ How theology informs youth ministry, as a general topic, has received academic attention. See David Livermore, “The Youth Ministry Education Debate,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* Fall, 2002; and Sam Richards “Christian Youthwork?” *Perspectives*, March 1999 6-10. In the US among the finest book length discussions is by Kenda Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, *Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

³⁴ I do discuss this in my own book *The Youth Ministers Survival Guide* Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992, which is a study of 185 full time youth pastors who had been fired or sacked from their positions.

³⁵ In our youth ministry degree program at Nyack College we go to great lengths to help our students gain an understanding of the “adult point of view”. For example, the 4th year students are required to come to my home for a meal. To get full credit they must: 1) call to ask what they can bring and what appropriate attire is for the occasion 2) come within 10 minutes of appointed time, 3) bring a gift for the hostess if not asked to bring something for the meal 4) turn off their mobile phone, and 5) be careful to engage in wide conversation instead of only the persons on either side. In East Coast USA culture, this is normal behavior for adults in “invited to a meal” situation.