

Transformation in Religious Practices and Its Impact on Singaporean Christian Youth

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Abstract

Young adults are not engaged spiritually, and consistent church attendance is facing challenges in a rapidly changing world. This study investigates social changes taking place in society, examining religious affiliation and diversity, to address transformation in religious practices, and seeks to understand the impact of these changes on the attitudes of youth. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were carried out. The underlying theory of Existentialism was applied and non-probability purposive sampling was used. It analysed social changes through thematic analysis and NVivo-14 software. Five themes emerged from the analysis of the data: disconnection between belief and belonging, influence of new religious ideas and contexts, reduction in the acceptance of traditional churches, expressive individualism, and education and change of mindset. Findings revealed significant changes to how religious practices of the youth are being transformed. The results of this study may guide the strategies and social policies of the church, particularly in development of innovative ways and in engaging the youth to enjoy an experience of God. The research provides a contemporary perspective on the meaning of religion, and shifts in the modes of religious expression by taking a thorough look at the contexts in which these are lived and the changes occurring silently in practises and behaviour of youth.

Keywords: Affiliation, Attendance, Christian youth, Singapore, Sociology

Introduction

Singapore, a small country with a myriad of ethnic and religious makeup, hosts most of the major religions in the world. The society in Singapore is marked by significant levels of inter religiosity and important developments in the religious environment. Over various historical epochs, traditional religion has experienced cycles of decline and growth. Similar trends of religious decrease can be seen worldwide. An increasing number of Singaporeans have been converting to Christianity. Therefore, amid conflicting patterns of religion waxing and waning, and people disaffiliating in many parts of the world, an analysis needs to be done of the way religion is practiced among the followers of the faith and the influence these changes have on how youth perceive and believe in religion.

Religion is a permanent component of the human social structure. This belief in a supernatural entity brings meaning to life (Durkheim, 1915). It has the unique ability to provide the individual with the meaning and purpose in life, and the influence it exerts on society impacts societal dynamics and processes ranging from the small world of an individual to large communities. This function of religion in directing an individual's actions is linked to the socio-cultural environment of the individual.

Background of the Study

Organized religion may be encountering a changing environment, yet this does not imply that

individuals are abandoning faith. Attendance at Christian religious services and frequency of prayer are at low levels, alongside a consistent increase in those identifying as non-religious. A Gallup Survey studied by Jones revealed that there has been a global decrease in people attending practised religion (2024). Conversely, in Singapore the picture appears more positive as there was an increase of +0.9% of Christians aged 15 to 24 years. The figures rose from 17.7% to 18.6%. However, the statistics appear to be in contrast with the next two age groups; there was -0.7% decrease in the proportion of Singaporean Christian youth in the next ten years age group (18.4% to 17.7%), and a further decline of (-1.8%) from 20.3% to 18.5% in the next ten years age group (Chiang, 2021).

Although Singaporeans are highly religious about practising their faith and a big majority are very clear about why they practise a religion, the same view cannot be held for more educated youth and those coming from higher social and economic backgrounds (Mathews et al., 2019). A fifth of the Singaporeans regard themselves as “no religion”.

However, in 2020, the percentage of Singaporean residents who consider religion as “rather important” or “very important” in their lives fell from three-quarters in 2012, to below two-thirds. Sng (2023) mentioned “that amongst Christians here, 13% of youth go to church “a few times or less a year”, while 1% never attend church. Four out of every 10 Christian youth do not pray daily. 5% have reported bringing up their children without religion.” Fragmented and sporadic research to date indicates that there is still much to learn about young people and religion (Smith & Pearce, 2001-2015; Chaves, 2011; Taylor & Snowdon, 2014). Consequently, a second-generation church is becoming manifest in the Singaporean Christian society. Long-term fundamental changes are reconfiguring the religious landscape. Consequently, it is no longer conceivable to practise Christianity as was done previously.

Religion is dynamic. Yet it holds paramount importance in the social world of young adults.

Therefore, an understanding of the positive and negative consequences of these young adults being exposed and involved in religion in these ever-changing circumstances becomes peremptory. During the 1970s and 1980s, social scientific study of youth was mostly concerned with ‘youth unemployment, youth subcultures, new social movements and cultural resistance to aspects of capitalism’ (Collins-Mayo & Dandelion, 2010).

Researchers of previous studies have focused on church attendance and church membership, but other forms of praying privately, and the anthropological factors that are fundamental in contributing to the outlook of individuals who are religious is not attended to (Ecklund et al., 2016). Hence, while sociologists of youth focused on the problems of young adults in society, sociologists of religion have overlooked how religious practices are being accepted by young adults in this changing society (Singh, 2020:167-17). In general, much of the current social science literature regarding religion and youth is merely outdated.

The present study focuses on the relevancy of religion amongst young Christian adults and whether religious practices are being transformed in Singaporean society? Specifically, it aims to explore the social changes associated with the transformation of Christian religious practices and the impact this has on the attitudes of the youth. This is studied through the lens of declining religious affiliation and attendance, and religious diversity.

Statement of Problem

Religion has been a vital indicator of social balance (Durkheim, 1915). In the absence of religion, most people in society today would be unable to coexist harmoniously with their neighbours (Okey-Kalu, 2021). People want their lives to be significant and they look for a purpose in life.

Today the youth in Singapore are exposed to a variety of morally contradictory ideologies, such as globalism, relativism, mass consumerism, free market capitalism and its emphasis on self-gratification or disdain for authority. They desire to live for important things in life and want a feeling of community and authenticity. In their quest for identity, many young people battle uncertainties and

require someone to believe in them. Suicide rates increased by over 26% in Singapore. For the fourth year in a row, 33.6% of all fatalities from suicide in 2022 occurred among those aged 10 to 29 years. This rise illustrates the invisible mental illness that permeates our culture, particularly among our youth (Agence France Presse (AFP, 2023) and Channel News Asia (CNA, 2022)).

They have emotional conflicts, question faith, lack spiritual experience and are unsatisfied with responses from church leaders (Mathews et al., 2019). They are not prepared to accept a definite creed which involves a large number of statements of belief about which they are not sure. They look for authenticity. Youth are searching to live their walk fully in an environment that allows people this space (Ong, 2020). In this journey for individuality, several youth encounter uncertainties and need someone to trust them. Some are faced with problems of marriage, parenting and abandonment. Others are so influenced by the prevailing secular culture that religion seems to have lost its relevance. Still others are so disappointed with organised religion that they decide to sever ties with the Christian church.

At the same time one believes that by cultivating a relationship with God, they can get the reassurance, confidence and hopefulness that circumstances are likely to improve (Dykas, 2021). One takes refuge through a relationship with God. When the prospects of success are dim, Huber (2023) explains hope plays an important role in preventing the individual from being demoralized. This hope and expectation makes the individual optimistic towards the future.

Further globalization makes it necessary for the individual to move away from home to work. Religion as is practised when a youth is in a new location becomes difficult. New challenges result from relocation (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2019:5). The young adult on an assignment spends time with a new community of people rather than with close friends of his religion or other religious groups previously engaged with. Youth today prefer to listen to

mass online or use religious apps for their prayers instead of going to church. They think whether going to church is practical and of what good is it. Young people hold different views on religion compared to those of previous generations (Chiang, 2021). The internet has recreated an expanded the public sphere by allowing more religious individuals to access religious materials online. This explains why many people attribute less importance to religion in life today. In other words, young adults are looking for meaning and purpose in life and believe in times of uncertainty they can trust a God who is certain in all things.

Filled with the feelings of anxiety, loneliness and alienation, the youth is stressed and looks to religions for psychological well-being. In this globalized and rapidly changing world, religion gives the youth a vision of how to make the world meaningful (Golebiewski, 2014). From this arises the pressing need to explore social changes in the transformation of religious practices and how this impacts the attitudes of the youth.

Significance of the Study

The processes of modernisation including migration, mass media, mass education, and urbanisation have brought people into contact with religious beliefs different from the one they may have practiced when they were young or might be practising. Multiple religions co-exist in modern societies and young people are growing up in religiously diverse environments. The traditional Christian church fails to engage the youth (Mangu, 2021). It does not encourage a mindset shift nor does it provide the youth with diverse opportunities like integrating faith with their professional aspirations. The youth lack a deep understanding of the Christian faith as they are not intellectually engaged. The formal nature of the organized church makes the youth feel alienated and they are left fatigued by conventional religion. Experiencing a crisis of identity, the presence of millennials and Gen Z in church is seeing a decline. Hence the church must start rethinking its approach to worship and church practices should be done differently. These young adults make up the cohorts that influence and make the future public policy. They are the window into the adults' world (Smith & Denton, 2005; Longest & Uecker, 2021). Thus, regardless of the sentiments

of older generations, recognizing and acknowledging the perspectives of young adults is imperative.

The results of this study may guide the strategies and social policies of the Christian church, particularly in the development of innovative ways such as leveraging technology and evolving with the changing culture of the youth. By enhancing interaction, engaging and enjoying an experience of God the church can extend the ministry beyond the church walls (Duron, 2023). Empowering the young adults to express their sentiments towards the church enables the religious leaders to comprehend their viewpoints through their perspectives.

The youth anticipates religion to make life meaningful with this new sense of hope. Individual expectations significantly influence their experiences within the practiced religion.

A core tenet of existentialism is that people exist, and have to create a meaning of existence. How this meaning of existence is made is unique to each individual. This implies taking responsibility for our actions (Beauvoir, 1948). The individual's subjective experience, freedom, and choice, encourages the exploration of the meaning and purpose of life.

According to Existential theory, the individual must take a "leap of faith" as being religious is not about joining a local congregation (Kierkegaard, 1835-1854; 1978-1998). Organized religions, rituals, or texts lack faith that is real and meaning that is spiritual (Whitehead, 2022). It is the individual's responsibility to discover what meaning is in relationship to the world. The individual has the ability to "reason," and he must have the right to choose his path without outside help.

Framework of the Study

Existentialism focuses on individual existence, freedom, and choice and encourages the exploration of the meaning and purpose of life (Solomon, 2017). It emphasizes the importance of personal experience, subjective interpretation and the absence of this freedom

results in anxiety.

This study posits that there is a transformation in the religious practices of the youth and aims to understand the impact this has on the attitude of the youth. To explore these transformations that are taking place it is crucial to study the concept of existence, an individual's existence in the world which provides him a space for individual choice and freedom. This is without the attachments of any transcendental or worldly obligations (Maritain, 2015: 33).

Existentialism upholds that anxiety is not merely a pathological condition but an awareness of freedom (Evans, 2006). Applying this theory helps to analyse how the influence of existentialism on these fundamental aspects of human existence and how individuals must create their own values and meaning in life, rather than relying on external sources such as religion or society.

Literature Review

As survey data is notoriously difficult to obtain in Singapore, reports by the Pew Research Committee and Gallup Surveys were instrumental in providing statistics. "Even a recent report on "Religion in Singapore" published by the Institute of Policy Studies at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Policy, which has connections with the government, relies on data from the International Social Survey Program Study of Religion. However, there is a notable gap in the research in Singapore with reference to addressing religious affiliation and attendance, and diversity in the religious sphere.

Religious Affiliation and Attendance

Social change denotes notable transformation over time in social institutions, patterns of behaviour, norms and values relating to culture.

"Religion is a multidimensional concept that can include a wide selection of different measures including religious beliefs and practices, participation, and affiliation" (Yaden, 2023). Religion is the effects and functions concerning the problems in our everyday life and the religious

beliefs and experiences that help to establish ultimate meaning in life and an institutional order (Luckmann, 2022). Religion denotes the conventional faith whose influence tends to diminish the lives of the adherents leading to religious practises being transformed.

However, transformation is not understood as religion dying but rather replacement by new concepts, beliefs, and practices that strongly adhere to the traditional faith but without structured organization. Change in traditional religion is accompanied by other social and political changes (Boguszewski et al., 2022).

Youth today, are the millennials between 23 and 38 years (Dimock, 2019). Youth in Singapore are defined “as aged 15–35 years old” (MCCY Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, 2021).

Research on young adults in America has consistently shown that “a third of Gen Z has no religion. This makes this generation the least religious when compared with the earlier ones” (Pew Research Center, 2015). Some youth feel overburdened by the obligations and responsibilities accompanying this stage of their lives and do not believe going to church is important. For others, religion loses its relevance as they are swayed by the dominating secular culture. Still others are so disappointed with organised religion and decide to dissolve ties with the churches (Chia, 2022). This indicates that religion is not being passed down by many people to their children, and as a social institution, religion is failing to play a vital role in the life of the youth.

Changing beliefs amongst the youth have resulted in global religious affiliation and religious attendance dropping according to the Gallup Survey (Jones, 2022). Though not affiliated with any religious organization, four out of every ten adults in America profess a belief in God or a higher power. While two out of every three adults hold the same opinion that a rational explanation for certain things can neither be given by science nor natural cause (Eichhorst, 2023).

In fact, many people affiliated with a given religion, may not find religion to be of any relevance to them nor do they consent to the importance of religion in their life (Wormald, 2015). Modern values replaced the traditional values of religion (Boguszewski et al., 2022). Since the Covid 19, there has been a significant slump in the religious affiliation of the people and the rate of church attendance (Travis, 2019; Newport, 2019). This underscores a noteworthy correlation between mass attendance and affiliation to a religion.

In 2010, more than a decade ago, not many young adults in Singapore mentioned having “no religion”. In 2021, there was a 20% rise in this segment of society (Min, 2021). “No religion” has become the newest religion in the world today (Bullard, 2016). In terms of faith being practised by youths, it implies that faith is fading away and “believing without belonging” is becoming the trend of a particular religion.

Religious Diversity

Religious practices are the personal act of prayer, the public act of going to church, and the formal act of church membership (Arold et al., 2022). Prayers done individually or privately seeking comfort in challenging times or participating in mass online would suggest institutional religious practices and religiosity become reduced and deintensified. Therefore, an individual experiences emotions which are positive and being satisfied in life by affiliating with a religion (Akbar & Keten, 2024). This effect is evident in how organized faith is practised by the youth.

Communities where previously there was a dominant religion were introduced to diverse religions with the influx of global migration, the enhancements in transportation and progress in communication technology, leading to religious diversity. Interaction between people of the same faith occurs at an astonishingly quicker pace. Religions have become more diverse with modernization and globalization rather than declining (Modongal, 2023). Societies undergo transformation as they modernise. This change took place gradually because of the Industrial revolution in the 19th century (University of Minnesota, 2016). Migration places people of different beliefs

together. Within a region or society, disparities in religious beliefs and practices have become distinctly apparent.

In the quest for truth, the youth explore various religions prior to reaching a conclusion concerning universal law. Our understanding of the multitude of religious traditions practised globally is enhanced by religious diversity. In a democratic society various religious traditions are seen evolving independently. For the individual this represents freedom, but for society, maintaining flexibility is paramount, as no single religion is to be valued above another. Youth consider themselves to be synonymous with world citizens when they identify with religious beliefs and practices which are similar (Mercier et al., 2023).

Conversely, identifying as citizens of a global community is not tantamount to adhering to the principles of religion as a global citizen. Youth may think themselves to be globally minded. However, youth upholding religious beliefs have lower acceptance and awareness of world diversity (Scott & Cnaan, 2020). As youth grow and develop, they get exposed to new ideas and contexts which impact their commitment to religion (Dollahite & Marks, 2019; King et al., 2022). All religions must be respected and tolerated, only then can religious diversity exist (SG 101, 2017). Religions should coexist peacefully without one religion championing or being the voice of religious truth. No religion is to be regarded in isolation.

Religious diversity stimulates interfaith competition and provides individuals with more choices. In seeking membership in different social groups, the youth make an effort to see which identity most genuinely matched with them (Jhangiani & Hammond, 2022). In this context, Existentialism promotes the responsibility and awareness of one's own being. It teaches that one has control of their direction in life. Further, this diversity enriches the individuals' spiritual journey and gives the individual an understanding of different ways in which meaning and purpose in life can be found.

As education increases, beliefs on controversial issues widen. For instance, scientific consensus among the more educated individuals regarding the Big Bang and human evolution, and climate change (Drummond & Fischhoff, 2017) is less. This results in being distrustful of the church, in institutional religions to seek our answers about science and religion and as repositories for truth (Ha et al., 2011, p.95-121). There is discord on individual opinion regarding scientific knowledge and other contentious subjects of science.

Furthermore, international educational institutions have long had the ability to shape young people through exposure to many cultures, excellent living conditions, and, of course, cutting-edge curricula that are relevant in a world that is changing all the time (Dattatraya, 2024). In such a setting, people learn to question conventional teaching methods and free themselves from conformist attitudes in order to better understand and navigate in a changing world. The traditional forms of religious beliefs are not left unimpeded but have come to be challenged by the rise of the new forms of rationality, embodied in science and technology. As new forms of religion are successful in attracting members, the success of a religion is weighed by the number of congregants. With different possibilities of spiritualities around, the youth find it hard to decide on any one religion. Consequently, the youth are moving away from religion.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative method which is “exploratory” because it is data-driven (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The research design suits this study since it seeks access to participants' understanding of their religious affiliation and diverse ways of practicing religion and probes deeper into their accounts (Holloway, 2005).

Sample

The participants of this study were six young adults (n=6) residing in Singapore, practising Christians aged 25–30 years. Non-probability purposive sampling was employed.

The researcher ensured the participants understood the purpose of the study and methodology. After obtaining the consent for participation from the participants, the other ethical measures of voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality and the freedom to withdraw were emphasized.

Instrument

Survey questions from Centrality of Religiosity Scale CRS-2012 (Huber & Huber, 2012) and YouGov Survey Results (2020) were used. In-depth semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used for the interviews.

Semi-structured questions form the foundation for data analysis. While the respondents were asked the same questions, occasionally questions had to be rephrased to confirm the participant understood what was asked and to validate the participant's response. At the end of the interview there was an additional opportunity for triangulation.

Data Analysis

Steps for conducting a thematic and inductive analysis of the interview data outlined by Braun & Clarke were employed (2014). To search for meanings, codes, indexing and extracting themes while categorising them into sub-categories, data and interview transcripts were used.

Throughout the interviews, raw data obtained from the informants was documented and interpretations made by the researcher were recorded. Authorization was sought for audio recording during the interviews. The data is presented in written format. The initial phase consisted of immersing oneself in the data to ensure familiarity with the depth and range of the content. Initial concepts were actively noted while searching for meanings, identifying patterns, themes, or categories. Using NVivo-14, coding was executed systematically across the entire dataset. In the next phase, the coded data were categorized by themes and in the final phase, themes found after field notes were

broadly studied. As the interview was recorded, raw data was preserved for review at a later date. This allowed the researcher to focus on the question/answer process at hand, facilitating the interviewee's ability to answer, while giving up the ability to re-engage at convenience (O'Leary, 2017). After analysing the data, it was classified according to the dimensions studied. This is achieved through questions relevant to the area studied.

Results and Discussion

After presenting the results from NVivo-14 analysis, the researchers moved to the thematic analysis of the data. The participants were interviewed separately. For the purpose of anonymity, participants were coded as follows: Participant-1, a university graduate, Participant-2, a PhD doing online theological studies at an American University, Participant-3, a Postgraduate, Participant-4, a PhD, and a religious teacher, working in the Pastoral Council, Participant-5 and Participant-6 Postgraduate. There was an equal distribution of male (n=3) and female (n=3) participants alongside their education and marital status. This balanced distribution of different age groups enriched the study as views of different age groups and levels of education were represented.

Every key informant (n=6) possessed a clear perspective of what being religious means, the way they practised faith and the importance of attending church worship. There were several shared reasons amongst the participants for not attending mass. Overall, analysis of six interview transcripts of the participants (n=6) resulted in five overarching themes being identified. These themes were semantically and latently explored to gain insight into the behaviour of young adults regarding the transformation of religious practices. These themes were prevalent throughout the transcripts, and 'particularly representative of many voices' in the interviews.

Disconnection between Belief and Purpose of Belonging

The first theme that emerged was a disconnection between their religious beliefs and the purpose of

belonging to a religion. This was evidenced from the responses. Participant-1 and Participant-6 did not find going to church important. Going to church and joining the church community was not liked by them, but they tried to be kind every day and offer a helping hand to those in need, occasionally gathering with the family each month to pray together. For Participant-2, being religious did not mean attending church worship as being religious comes from within. It was more of giving respect to one's beliefs and values.

Religious beliefs are the set of principles that members of a particular religion follow together. However, the findings suggest that the youth interviewed accepted religion and practised the religious beliefs but refrained from associating with organized religion. The conventions of being kind, tolerant, and accepting others was religion for them. The Youths are looking for a meaning in life. Collectively, these findings suggest that the perception of these youth regarding being religious and beliefs are shaped and permeated by what they do in everyday life. The results also emphasize that the individual has free choice to create meaning and develop values in life.

While this study aligns with the views of Luckmann that meaning in life can be found through religious beliefs and experiences, it contradicts with the view that it is through an institutional order (2022). Their relationships with God does not necessarily work as the church dictates. Thus, indicating that the sacred, though less dominant in modern society, is nonetheless present. Indeed, in numerous ways it continues to exist. This leads the youth to perceive the concept of the traditional Christian faith as a form of 'believing' but not 'belonging'. The significance of meaning and the purpose of human existence is decisive.

Influence of New Religious Ideas and Contexts

The second theme that emerged was the influence of new religious ideas and contexts. All the six participants prayed every day. They

prayed alone and privately in a place which was not within a church or religious congregation. Most attested their prayer was a verbal expression, and prayed every morning and evening. They prayed at night in a private or a quiet corner as it helped to recollect what happened throughout the day. Participant-3 prayed from what was learnt and used technology, in particular Spotify. Still others meditated daily. They echoed that meditation is religion for them.

The findings suggest that there has been an expansion of New Age beliefs and practises since the 1960s and 1970s, while a significant contribution is made by the Internet and social media to the dissemination of new religious customs amongst younger people. Consequently, there is a drop in church participation (Travis, 2019; Newport, 2019). Nevertheless, there are alternative means to connect with God. Such connections can occur online, through meditation, reflecting silently on religious scriptures and engaging in good deeds in daily life.

All the participants acknowledged their belief in God and expressed prayers and performing good actions gave them a profound sense of well-being. This contradicts the findings of Mathews et al. (2019) and Sng (2023) that young Christians are not religious and four in ten Christian youth do not pray daily. The effects of social change have become visible in the variety of religious practices and also influence the attitudes of the youth, as there is flexibility and diversity among these unchurched youths.

Reduction in the Acceptance of Traditional Church

The third theme that emerged was a reduction in the acceptance of traditional churches. Five key informants out of six (n=5) opined being religious does not equate to church affiliation and attendance. Prayers for them are as important as church attendance. However, they suggested they should be free to pray outside a concrete and confined structure. There should be a shift from the idea that the church should be a physical location.

Participants-1, 2 and 3 remarked that attending places of worship was not important. It is boring as they feel they are stuck in where they are. Hearing mass is very structured, a little bit more rigid. You have to follow a fixed time and place. They felt comfortable watching mass online on YouTube. These participants unanimously believed going to mass should be optional.

None of the six participants affiliated with an organized religion. Conventional religion is felt irrelevant to these young individuals, leading to weakened traditional beliefs. This corroborates with the findings of previous studies (Wormald, 2015; Min, 2021 & Jones, 2022). The church does not resonate with the language of these youth. The church is boring, and the church timings are rigid. They want to break ties with the church as they are disappointed (Chia, 2022).

The results reveal setting foot in the church is no longer deemed a necessity. Their connection with the church ultimately depends on how effectively the church serves or aligns with their beliefs. The results portray a clear narrative that all the participants practise their faith outside of church, illustrating shifting beliefs.

Expressive Individualism

The fourth theme that emerged was expressive individualism. Participants had mixed views about praying as a family, trying to act the way people whom they cared about expected them to do with reference to religion.

Participants-2 and 6 uncovered that understanding of a religion is within yourself, an individual concern. It should not be forced. It is how you actually find that peace yourself and not by following your elders. Some participants mentioned that when they were young it was difficult not to accept their parents' views. Now they do not agree with certain things, but still, they are part of the church and believe in religion and the Christian church. Others dispute that prayer should not be limited by place, topic or by the way it is recited. It can be spontaneous; a prayer said in the instance someone is sick and requests help

or intercession. The findings align with the Existential theory where each one of us decides who and what we are through our actions (Kierkegaard, 1835-1854; 1978-1998). Following a religion largely depends on your own journey and not the expectations of others.

Prayers were said by all six participants every day, either in the morning or the night. It took different forms, such as a personal or a quiet conversation with God. They do not like to be forced to follow their elders. The results highlighted the distinctive characteristics of religion necessitating the faithful to go beyond themselves, do good for others or be kind to people. This extends well beyond just attending mass for them. Their faith is embodied in their daily actions. The individual wants to have the freedom to make choices. This answers both the research questions showing drop in religious participation, religious diversity and how the attitudes of the youth lean towards a life informed by personal subjective experiences.

Education and Change of Mindset

The fifth theme that emerged from the data showed the effect of education on the mindset of the youth. All the six participants believe in exploring other religious beliefs, religious systems, spiritualities while being rational, secular and religious.

The participants agreed that there should be a separation of religion and state. One can have personal religious beliefs and there can also be secular beliefs. Religious beliefs are a form of value system that an individual has. It is not something that can be forced upon others. They believed that there should be religious schools and Christian schools and beliefs should not be altered. One must be both a rational intellectual and a religious person.

All the participants advocated secularism, rationalism and did not find that their social and economic well-being could be protected if they were to compromise their religious beliefs. They have shown openness to understanding other religious beliefs.

The six participants were tertiary educated but avoided traditional church service. Education does not diminish their religiosity, as the data indicated

that religious faith was of significant value to them, and they have become more devout. They express a desire to explore other religions and respect differing beliefs. This bears witness to the global-mindedness mentioned by Scott and Cnaan (2020) and aligns with the Singapore Government principles of respecting all religions (SG, 101, 2017). One can respect, admire and appreciate other religious practices while maintaining their own traditions. This relates to the first research question regarding social changes in the transformation of religious practices that reflect religious diversity and its influence on youth attitudes.

“Existentialism provides the framework to understand that the individual must take responsibility for existence and choose how to give meaning to life and the world. Individuals must make choices and the ability to do this gives true meaning to their lives (Kierkegaard, 1835-1854).” Regarding the findings of this study, the youth are striving to make a personal choice that is a free decision to derive meaning from religion and cultivate their values. Thus, it seems that during this phase of life, youth seek to form their own identity and be independent of their own family, rejecting both their parents’ beliefs and values and the established norms of the broader society.

Regarding research question one, data indicates lack of religious affiliation as all the six participants (n=6) do not engage in organized worship. There is an interiorization of religious practice. They speak to God in a simpler, everyday language. Prayer is done differently without the constraints of organized and formal religion. Separation of church and state is critically important, and they all advocated secularism and individualism.

Concerning research question two, their belonging to the church hinges on how effectively the church resonates with their beliefs and meets with their needs. Families play a role in the passing of religion to the next generation and the youth expressed that religiosity in this manner is linked to conformity. Praying privately, meditation, doing good things instead is an indication of

their religiosity. Yet they have become spiritual and devout. Education has fostered in them a pressing desire to explore religions different from the one practised by them. These participants have learnt to integrate education with religion and can readily accept explanations in a rational way.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study could have various possible implications in real life as to the exposure and involvement of youth in religion. It is a call for churches to reflect, reassess, and realign their practices with the teachings of Christ. Only then can they hope to bridge the growing gap with the younger generation.

Young adults would like to be involved in the church more than ever, and church leaders must find methods to both engage the young under their direction and draw new members to their ministry. Various ministry leaders, small group leaders or church elders must oversee the young people enthusiastically involved and committed.

Limitations of the Findings

This study was conducted on a small group and the participants were very well qualified academically as well as theologically. Further it was a qualitative study. The short study duration limits the comprehensiveness and generalizability of the findings. As it is not possible to analyze every member of the Christian population, this study analyzes a portion of it qualitatively. The sample may not have represented every ethnicity or different socio-economic backgrounds in Singapore. The sample was also limited because of the geography and does not apply to the national population of Singapore.

Practical Value of the Paper

The results of this study may guide the strategies and social policies of the church, particularly in the development of innovative ways, enhancing interaction, engaging and enjoying an experience of God. The traditional church fails to engage the youth. It does not encourage a mindset shift nor does it provide the youth with diverse opportunities like integrating faith with their professional aspirations.

The formal nature of the organized church makes the youth feel alienated, and they are left fatigued by conventional religion. Empowering the young adults to express their sentiments towards the church enables the religious leaders to comprehend their viewpoints through their perspectives. When people engage in sustained, meaningful interactions with others who hold a different worldview, individuals are able to make a relative understanding of the different religious standpoints and can reckon that reality can be perceived and lived differently from what one had thought of as the only way. It is a call for churches to reflect, reassess, and realign their practices with the teachings of Christ. Only then can they hope to bridge the growing gap with the younger generation.

Directions for Future Research

Data collection and documentation should also be studied quantitatively through questionnaires rather than being purely descriptive. Most studies of religion and young adults are interview-based. This means the empirical evidence primarily comprises what people say about religion and their lives rather than what researchers observe is being done. Hence more ethnographic or observational studies of religious contexts in which youth spend time should be encouraged. Researchers may undertake future studies asking creedal questions, one based on the doctrines of the church and why exactly there is a need for membership and belonging to the church. This study was based on a looser definition of belief in God. Therefore, the percentage of youth believing in God was high.

Conclusion

The influence of organised religion is lost amongst the younger generations. Society is undergoing transformation with a momentum appearing to be irreversible. All the participants in this research did not hold a belief in organised religion. For them, the church should extend outside boundaries. Although they were all university educated, education did not make them believe less in religion. Moreover, they prayed every day and every time. Previous

studies show that when people reach the age of 30, as they transition into adulthood, they tend to be less religious than their parents were.

Nonetheless, the youth studied embraced religious beliefs due to the personal benefits coming from religion and spirituality. Prayer serves as a significant means for them to encounter and communicate with God. The youth in this study prioritize individualism. They want to have freedom and personal choice. As they are free, they seek to find meaning in life.

Religion is a vital aspect of human experience. Religious practices can embrace sermons, sacrifices, festivals, funeral ceremonies, wedding events, religious festivities that incorporate elements such as symbols, music, clothing, or rituals, and community service. Nevertheless, there are certain situations in which these beliefs and practices may not be feasible to be carried out. These situations suggest that religion does not fade nor does religion as practised traditionally become obsolete. There might be a move from religion but not a withdrawal. Rather, religion evolves and there are alternate forms by which religion is practised.

The views of these young Singaporean Christian participants towards religion were not a whatever, ambivalent or indifferent approach. Rather, religion was seriously viewed and their involvement in religious thoughts and practices was profound from an early age.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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