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STEVE TILLEY

Lifelines : Youth Ministry

What are the five most important books for youth ministry? OK, I'm going to cheat. Desert Island Discs lets you take the Bible and the complete works of Shakey so I'll assume it's five plus them. Biblical youth work takes the Bible as its starting point. Which leads me into book one:

Christian Youth Work: A Strategy for Youth Leaders

Mark Ashton and Phil Moon
Monarch, Crowborough 1995

This was, to my knowledge, the first attempt to write about youth work starting with the Bible. Mark Ashton's original work (1986), re-worked to good effect by Phil Moon, did not take youth work issues and ask what the Bible had to say about them; rather it worked through the Bible and asked what it had to say about youth work. The result is a biblical strategy for youth leaders and the right starting point for anyone wanting to do church-based youth ministry. It gave us five headings under which youthwork can be audited:

- Prayer: the power behind the work
- Gospel: the central attraction of the work
- Bible: the backbone of the teaching pattern
- Relationships: the importance of the individual
- Church: the fellowship of the body of Christ

It is the one youth work book I have returned to again and again. I always find it reassuring to be reminded that whilst Jesus encountered many people during his earthly ministry he seemed content to make a significant impact on the lives of just a few. Good news indeed for small youth groups.

Youth A Part: Young People and the Church

General Synod Working Party
National Society/Church House Publishing, London 1996

The result of three years working party struggle, this report to General Synod made sixteen key recommendations. Drastically summarised, they encourage the church to take youth work seriously. Evangelicals will find it a flawed document but it needed to be loose enough to be accepted by non-evangelicals. (Indeed attempts in debate to sharpen up its Gospel focus failed.) It provides a basis upon which any member of any anglican church can nag their diocese to put more resources into youth ministry.

The report makes several key recommendations but for me the most significant were summarised thus: 'We have a vision of a Church where young people are leaders and innovators.' Brilliant.

Growing Up Evangelical: Youth Work and the Making of a Subculture

Pete Ward

SPCK, London 1996

Youth work is the cutting edge of church culture. Today's youth worship songs become tomorrow's mainstream worship songs. Today's young Christians become tomorrow's clergy. So if you want to know what the church will be like tomorrow you only have to look at its youth work today. This book points the finger at alleged inadequacies within the fellowship model of youth work operated by evangelical churches for the last forty years. It raises important questions and challenges anyone doing church-based youth work which is not, as a main aim, evangelistic.

Some of the criticisms are harsh. For instance many churches operate the fellowship model of youth work incompletely; that doesn't make the model flawed. Others are right on the nail. It is true that many evangelical youth ministries have only defined spiritual maturity in terms of leadership within that same ministry. (So Venture members are assumed to have come good only if they join the leadership team.) This book challenged me to see the fruit of youth ministry not just as changed lives but also as exported leaders.

Jesus For A New Generation: Reaching Out To Today's Young Adults

Kevin Ford with Jim Denney

Hodder & Stoughton, London 1996

How should we do evangelism with young adults in a post-modern culture? Well, asking a young adult might be a good way to start. Here, Leighton Ford's son (Billy Graham's nephew) explains, for the benefit of his parents' generation, that today's young adults are looking for social and emotional involvement before spiritual. In other words we need to become friends before we can be evangelists.

This is not as hard as it sounds. Anyone who goes out of their way to befriend a teenager or young adult will be a bit unusual these days. If you really listen you will earn, eventually, the right to be listened to yourself. Not so fast off the mark with the old proclamation though. The gimmick of having a soap running through the book earths all the principles in day-to-day practicality.

When Kumbaya Is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry

Dean Borgman

Hendrickson, Peabody, Mass. 1997

This is a theology of youth ministry, not a theology of youth. It is designed to be an antidote to burn-out in tired youth ministers. The assumption is that reflective theology (thinking about what you do rather than simply doing) will keep you refreshed. I set out to read it quickly and had to slow down to ponder. It is a nicely written book with some sentences I wish I'd thought of. This from page 28, 'In so many ways we adults leave young people to their own devices, then we scorn the devices.' Dean Borgman's thesis is that theology need to be informed by the street, but the street also needs the resources of theologians.

I am always on the look out for good definitions of youth ministry. Often those doing it find it hard to articulate what, precisely, it is that they are doing. For the moment I'm going to go with this: 'Youth ministry these days is providing young people with a safe place where caring mentors allow them to hear others tell their stories until they have the courage to tell their own story, be affirmed in their personhood, and in that context hear the great story of God's love' (p 229).

I'm still reading, and wrestling with, this book and enjoying it very much.

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