

CANADA YOUTH 2018

July 2-7, 2018

Rev. Dr. Cheryl Gaver

Canada Youth 2018 – Andrew Root’s Keynote Presentations

ANDREW ROOT - FACILITATOR

Overview

Andrew Root was the keynote speaker for the Youth Ministry Training Track. He graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, and is the assistant professor of youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is author of such books as:

- *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness*
- *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies,*
- *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*
- *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*
- *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together*
- *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*

Monday Session

In *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, Root looked at the shift from ministry and technology towards relational ministry. For him:

- **Technology:**
 - shapes our imagination; sees everything as being a problem and technology as having the solution; and the end result is a loss of the mystery of being.
 - If people don’t know something, all they have to do is google it.
 - There is almost no time difference between asking the question and finding the answer.
- **Relational Ministry:**
 - This is the challenge for most churches today. We have to find a new form – a new way to preach and to bring in people.
- **Challenge:**
 - Where is the technological mindset coming out in congregations?
- **Outsourcing Within the Church:**
 - Why has the church outsourced transmission of faith from the family to the church?
- **Key Question**
 - Am I to do youth ministry? OR
 - Am I to equip families to do youth ministry?

Much of the next part of the session revolved around Root’s book, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*. For Bonhoeffer, theology was not some abstract set of rules. It started as something lived and concrete in the lives of people. He saw a distinction between:

- **Minister** – who acts
- **Theologian** – who reflects

And saw a *holy moment* where the minister interacted with real life and questions.

We need to honour the questions students have. One example of a shift is from:

- Where I **show up and tell stories**

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- To I show up and share the Bible text – they tell the stories
- In Mark 9 – the question of “how long” is not abstract nor is it a diagnostic term.

Tuesday Session

The next sessions focused on the evolving relationship between faith and secularism.

A Matter of Definitions

- What is **faith**? (2 Timothy 1:3-8)
- Why is **faith formation** so hard?
 - Some people see faith formation as a matter of shaping morals & ethics while others see it as a matter of beliefs
 - Is it indoctrination or a guide?
- What is **secularism**?
 - Multiple and competing definitions – it’s a bit like an iceberg with most of it buried
 - What is “good” – why should anyone be good? – kindness, etc. needs to be grounded in some bigger story.
- Is **secular world value free**?
 - Is not going to church the same as not going to the dentist?

Future of the Church

The future of the church is not the youth, but the Lord Jesus Christ alone. The objective of the church is to encounter Jesus.

Since the days of the youth movement, church youth work has often lacked that element of Christian sobriety that alone might enable it to recognize that the spirit of youth is not the Holy Spirit and that the future of the church is not youth itself but rather the Lord Jesus Christ alone. It is the task of youth not to reshape the church, but rather to listen to the Word of God; it is the task of the church not to capture the youth, but to teach and proclaim the Word of God.” (Bonhoeffer)

The Modern Disconnect (Charles Taylor – On the Secular Age)

What do I mean by faith?

- Some see it as an **expression** of something; faith is what we do, and our focus is on our need to get more money, more numbers...
- Others see it as a **condition** – circumstances and environment are important for shaping it?

Ideally, the two are relatively close, and they come together to shape our **belief** system – the encounter with divine actions. What modernity has done, however, is stretch all three far apart.



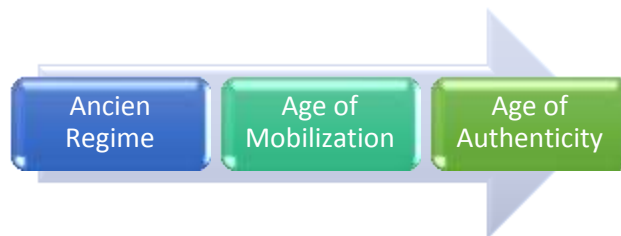
From A.D. 1500-2000, it was nearly impossible to find people who didn't believe in God. Nowadays, however, we have one or two generations of people who have no concept of God.

The challenge is how to reach them?

To explore this in more detail and, perhaps, find a clue on how to reach them, Andrew Root took us on a time travel trip.

From A.D. 1500-2000, it was nearly impossible to find people who didn't believe in God. Now, however, we have several generations of people who have no concept of God. Why? What has changed?

The First Triad: From a Societal Perspective



Ancient Regime

This was the era of kings and queens, of mystery and enchantment.

- Rulers and leaders are above ordinary people. They have a special connection with God.
- What rulers/leaders say should be taken as coming from God.
- Ordinary people should obey – accept without questioning – what they are told.
- We live in the (*magical*) cosmos – where God speaks to us even through nature – e.g., hurricanes are a sign of God's condemnation

He showed us a video clip from *The Crown* which dealt with the coronation of Elizabeth II – and asked us, “Who wants transparency when you can have magic? Who wants prose when you can have poetry?”

Even our concept of time is different. Sacred time is different from ordinary time. Sacred time in the present links us to sacred time in the past.



Age of Mobilization

This begins with the Reformation. The magic and mystery of the ancient world is broken. People take the right to think for themselves, and to question. This is also when people begin to move away from traditional homelands (e.g., America).

This age marks the rise of democracy (“*We the people*”) and polite society – atheism is now possible. God may have laws, but we decide the design.

- The affirmation of ordinary life – everyone prays
- We live in the (*scientific*) universe not the (*magical*) cosmos. The universe emphasizes our ability to understand the mystery. The mind becomes more important.
- Duty is something people accept.

Age of Authenticity

This is the age we currently live in. It is the age of individualism.

- Questions of “Who Am I?” are extremely important for this group – whether it’s gender, race, religion, nationality. These terms are worked out within the framework of “who am I”? What is the “real” me?
 - One issue that has emerged – what pronouns should we use when people don’t define themselves as male or female?
- You don’t have to be loyal to anything if it doesn’t work for you.
 - The new ethic is not “anything goes” but rather “what speaks to me”
- Interestingly – many may be willing to die for Jesus but they are not willing to be bored for Jesus!

Changing Understandings of Sex

- **Ancien Regime** – Sex is for God
- **Age of Mobilization** – Sex is for family
- **Age of Authenticity** – Sex is for what you feel

Challenges of this third age:

- Without normative values, it is really hard to keep groups together.
- (*Bonhoeffer*) The question is not what is right or wrong, but what is the will of God?
- People ask, “Why should I be part of a church that does good things but has moments of imperialistic corruption?”
- A sense of an eclipse of grace – is it really needed? Or does it need to be re-interpreted for people who do not have the same sense of condemnation as in the past?

The Second Triad

Andrew Root then approached the same information from a different perspective (Durkheim / sociological) – i.e., how it applies to the Church.



Paleo. You don’t think about what it means to be “Roman Catholic” – everything you do is a religious act. (Actually the word “religion” didn’t even exist as a noun). If you want to have a modern take on this – think *Handmaid’s Tale*. What priests do is “magic” – you don’t question – you accept.

Neo. This is the age of denominations. Denominations need loyalty. We assume that our neighbours are just like us. We have begun shifting (or begun to shift) religion from the realm of nature (all-encompassing life) to something more personal – individualistic – which has led to the creation of new groups –new denominations.

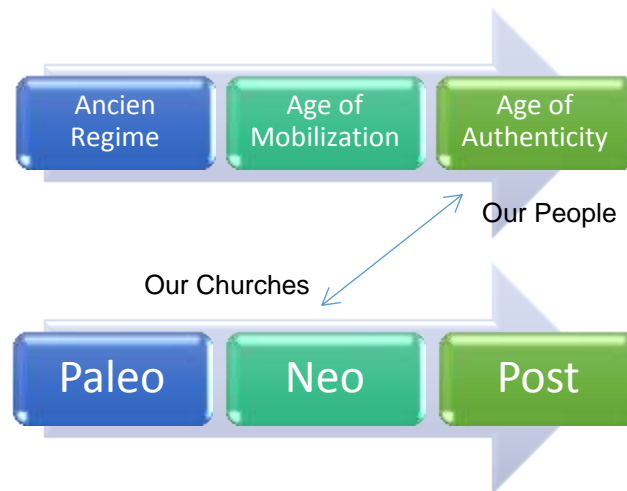
Post. All religious forms are obsolete. We recognize people are different – have different values, faiths, etc. and mix-and-match.

For example, Lily Allen wrote:

And I am a weapon of massive consumption, and it’s not my fault, it’s how I’m programmed to function. (Source: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=OaAmjrclv0>)

Now I’m not a saint, but I’m not a sinner and everything’s cool as long as I’m getting thinner. (Source: <https://pinterest.ca/pin/186829084516064175/>)

The Challenge for Churches



For example:

The PCUSA is committed to an ethics which reflects the “Age of Authenticity” but it functions as “Neo”

Solutions

1. We try to force people back into the *Age of Mobilization* or the *Ancien Regime* –
 - a. For example, some fundamentalist groups try to do this but ...
 - b. Some evangelical groups tend to be more successful at doing this than are the mainline denominations
2. We try to strip down the denominational affiliation
 - a. For example, Rick Warren (*Purpose-Driven Church*) – allows people to search for their own purpose
 - b. In doing this, we run the risk of losing the transcendence of the Gospel and God

Charles Taylor wrote:

The immanent frame is a constructed social space that frames our lives entirely within a natural (rather than supernatural) order. It is the circumscribed space of the modern social imaginary that precludes transcendence.

The Secular Age

According to Taylor:

The Secular Age: You can believe but you cannot believe without doubt and you cannot doubt without some kind of belief.

Most youth are crossed up – belief – doubt – belief – doubt – you see it in the sentiment that many college youth express: “they are spiritual but not religious”.

- I don’t have to go to church to be spiritual. What do you need to be spiritual?
- **Can we offer a space to explore faith?**

The Third Triad: The Seculars

What do we mean by “secularism”? This is a huge topic in itself because “secularism” can be defined in many different ways. For example:

- Secular 0 – Sacred / Profane

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- Secular 1 – Public / Private
- Secular 2 – Religious / A-religious (not religious)
- Secular 3 – Takes/Spins

Most of the discussion that youth leaders and congregations focus on is “Secular 2” – “what can we do to keep the church going?” but people are operating at a “Secular 3” level – i.e., there is a “take and spin” to everything that everyone says.

No one today can say, “this is true – there is no question”. Everything is “open take”

- *(I wonder if this explains why Trump doesn't get challenged more. So many people don't believe that anything is really true!)*
- A goal of youth leaders is to help youth sort out – “take” Christian experiences.

Andrew's Triads – What is Faith?

Triad 1 – Look at Saul in Damascus

- Kenosis Zealous for God (e.g., Aaron's grandson)
 - But we have Abram – who represents the *Ancien Regime* mentality (obedience & obedience)
 - Phineas – who represents the *Secular 2* mentality.
- Being blind – his understanding of faith is transformed and complete on God.
 - This is *Kenosis* which is the oldest part of the New Testament and is central to Paul.
 - Our whole understanding of the world is transformed –
 - in a sense, “everything” is permitted – but should we?
 - Consider the issue of eating pork or food that has been consecrated to foreign gods – Paul argues that all food is now permitted to Christians but because of the sensibilities of others, it may be better not to eat it ... to respect the sensibilities (and weaknesses) of others

Triad 2 – Hypostatic Experience

- This is where we connect with others

Triad 3 - Theosis

- Combined with *Kenosis* and *hypostatic* experiences is *theosis* (where we are taken up into Christ).
 - People have such experiences but are often afraid to share them (feel closed spin).