



Youth Ministry & Science

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Table of Contents

3	Introduction
4	The Landscape
4	A Brief History of American Youth Ministry
5	The Current Landscape of American Youth Ministry
6	The State of Science-and-Faith in American Youth Ministry
6	Survey Results
7	Focus Group Results
9	Youth Focus Groups
11	Youth Survey
12	What the Research Reveals About Teenagers and Transcendence
16	Why Young People? Why Youth Ministry?
20	How We Propose To Change the Conversation in Youth Ministry
20	A Road Map to Change
21	What We'll Do
21	Resources for Youth
21	Continuing Training for Youth Workers
22	The Classroom
23	Early Results
24	Conclusion

Appendix A—Online Survey Results

Appendix B—Youth Survey Results

Appendix C—Literature Review

Appendix D—Endorsements

Introduction

One might think that no group is more in tune with American teenagers than their youth pastors, but when it comes to science-and-faith, these two groups are surprisingly far apart. Through an extensive investigation into the thoughts and opinions of both youth and youth ministers, we uncovered a generational difference that threatens to cripple the church for years to come. In brief, we found that teenagers are acutely aware of the ways that science implicates their faith, but youth ministers either do not fully understand this issue or feel inadequate to address it. Youth ministers lack education in science, and they are under-resourced by their seminaries and denominational publishing houses to address science as an issue of faith.

In the following pages, we lay out the landscape of contemporary American youth ministry, and we highlight the findings in our research. We then provide an interpretive framework for understanding how the modern, scientific world presses in on teenagers and why we think youth ministers fail to tackle the issues of science. Finally, we propose a road map for change. We are confident that with time, energy, and resources, science can go from an afterthought in American youth ministry to a primary concern.

“This generational difference is not a simple discomfort with science among youth ministers, but a thoroughgoing disconnect in outlook and worldview.”

In our opinion, this generational difference is not a simple discomfort with science among youth ministers, but a thoroughgoing disconnect in outlook and worldview. As such, the solution must be resolute and comprehensive. Nothing less than a program that touches every aspect of youth ministry will bridge that gap. From the academic to the popular, from large conferences to confirmation curricula, science needs to become an integrated topic across the youth ministry landscape.

The Landscape

As a distinct endeavor within congregational ministry, youth ministry is less than a century old, and yet it has undergone significant shifts of focus in those years. Currently, the shifts are relatively seismic, leaving a fragmented field with various nodes of influence but none in a dominant position. As a result of the current landscape, the authors of this report are uniquely positioned to catalyze a sea change in the importance of science in youth ministry.

“While youth regularly ask their youth ministers science-related questions, and science is among the reasons that youth abandon the faith, youth ministers are desperately under-resourced for talking to and teaching youth about the connections between science and faith.”

This change is urgently needed, as the survey results below show. While youth regularly ask their youth ministers science-related questions, and science is among the reasons that youth abandon the faith, youth ministers are desperately under-resourced for talking to and teaching youth about the connections between science and faith. Indeed, youth ministers are unaware that there is a problem.

A Brief History of American Youth Ministry

In 1903, George Albert Coe launched the religious education movement in the U.S. with the inaugural meeting of the Religious Education Association. In his seminal book, *A Social Theory of Religious Education* (1917), Coe argued that the insights of modern scholarship should be taught in religious settings, and he made special mention of science:

We must carry the unsectarianism of science into our analysis of what is specifically religious. Psychology, sociology, and experiment must speak in their own tongue with respect to the most intimate things in religious experience.¹

Children, he wrote, are interested in causal relationships, and we do them a disservice when we answer their questions with, “God did it.” Science, Coe proposed, needed to be a central tenet of Christian education.²

Children’s ministry thrived in the years following the birth of the REA, but youth ministry was some years in the distance. In fact, in the early 20th century, developmental theorists were just beginning to come to terms with adolescence as a distinct developmental life-stage. Psychologist Erik Erikson famously coined the phrase “identity crisis” to describe the challenge the 12-to-18-year-olds face at determining who they are in society and their families-of-origin.

As adolescent theory developed, driven by Erikson and others, so was youth ministry becoming a discrete ministry in its own right. In the middle of the 20th century, evangelical parachurch ministries like Young Life (1941) and Youth for Christ (1946) were founded. Just as these conservative youth ministries were growing, mainline denominations were “amputating costly youth departments” in response to a 1965 recommendation by the World Council of Churches that adolescents be integrated into the life of the congregation. As a result, Kenda Creasy Dean writes, “By the end of the century, young people’s absence, not their presence, had become normative for American Christianity”—at least in the mainline.³

1. George Albert Coe, *A Social Theory of Religious Education* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1917), 292.

2. Coe, 144.

3. Kenda Dean, “The New Rhetoric in Youth Ministry,” in Andrew Root and Kenda Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 28.

“In 50 years, youth ministry went from a grassroots affair to a complex and commercial system.”

While youth involvement was declining across the mainline, it was growing significantly in evangelicalism. In 1950, it was unheard of for a congregation to employ a dedicated youth minister; by 2000, it was unheard of not to. In those five decades, an entire industry grew up to support youth ministers: curriculum companies, publishing houses, magazines, mission organizations, camps and retreat centers, consultancies, events and conferences, classes at seminaries and majors at Christian colleges. In 50 years, youth ministry went from a grassroots affair to a complex and commercial system.

The Current Landscape of American Youth Ministry

At the turn of the millennium, Youth Specialties (YS) stood atop the hill of youth ministry service organizations. YS owned both the strongest publishing line (in partnership with Zondervan) and the largest conference (the National Youth Workers Convention, with as many as 15,000 in attendance over three cities). But with the death of founder Mike Yaconelli in 2003, YS began a decline that continues today. After several changes of ownership, YS is now owned by Real Resources, a non-profit in Minneapolis. The publishing and conferences of YS continues, but in a less robust form.

Into the gap have stepped several evangelical organizations, including Group Publishing, owner of the Simply Youth Ministry books and conference. The Southern Baptist Convention, currently the largest denomination in the U.S., has forayed into youth ministry through its own Lifeway Publishing House and FUGE camps. Meanwhile, the single largest gathering of Christian youth is the ELCA's triennial Youth Gathering, with over 35,000 in attendance.

Perhaps the most noteworthy development of the past decade has been the ascendancy of two seminaries—one on each coast—to the forefront of youth ministry.⁴ On the East Coast, Princeton Theological Seminary launched the Institute for Youth Ministry (IYM) in 1995, led by then-Ph.D.-student, Kenda Creasy Dean. In addition to granting degrees and certificates, IYM runs an annual conference, supports scholarship and publishing, and holds consultations on various topics in youth ministry.

On the West Coast, Fuller Theological Seminary opened the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) in 2003. FYI develops resources including curriculum, a podcast, an e-journal, and a certificate in urban ministry. Surely the most popular resource from FYI is *Sticky Faith*, an ecosystem of books, curricula, training events, digital resources, and research meant to battle church attrition among Christian youth.

“The youth ministry marketplace is still quite fragmented, lacking any single, monolithic presence to guide the collective imagination of youth workers.”

At a time when many of the commercial organizations in youth ministry have stumbled, these two academic institutions have stepped into the gap to provide support and resources to youth ministers, both evangelical and mainline. However, the youth ministry marketplace is still quite fragmented, lacking any single, monolithic presence to guide the collective imagination of youth workers. It is for this reason, as well as the positive relationship that this study's authors have with both IYM and FYI, that we are confident that we can quickly elevate science-and-faith to a foremost conversation in American youth ministry.

4. Two of the authors of this report hold degrees from each of these seminaries. Both seminaries have expressed interest in being involved in the project as it moves forward.

The State of Science-and-Faith in American Youth Ministry

In order to gauge the state of the dialogue regarding science and faith in youth ministry, the authors of this report engaged in mixed-methods research in the spring of 2014.

While not rigorously scientific, we are convinced that our research paints a realistic picture and leads us to two related conclusions: 1) youth are heavily influenced by scientific reasoning and want to discuss science in their church-based activities, and 2) youth ministers are severely under-resourced on this topic, leading them to lack for both formal teaching opportunities and informal conversational opportunities.

“Youth are heavily influenced by scientific reasoning and want to discuss science in their church-based activities, and youth ministers are severely under-resourced on this topic.”

Survey Results

The quantitative study we undertook was an online survey, conducted between and April 7 and May 16, 2014. A total of 761 respondents answered 24 questions.⁵ The respondents to the online survey were overwhelmingly paid youth ministers (77%) and between the ages of 25 and 44 (68%). Half have completed a graduate degree (48%), and half been working in youth ministry for a decade or more (49%). Most work for a local congregation (90%). Our respondents were spread across 47 states and the District of Columbia. The denominational spread was broad, with the largest representations being Lutheran (26%), Presbyterian (15%), Methodist (15%), and non-denominational (12%).

When it comes to youth ministers’ education and interest in science, 6-in-10 admit to have taken only the bare minimum of required science classes in school (59%), and a scant 6% majored in a natural science field in college. Yet they are not necessarily predisposed to mistrust science: three-quarters disagree with the statement, “The teachings of science and religion ultimately conflict with one another” (77%), and 7-in-10 report that their faith has been strengthened by scientific findings (71%). The same number report that they are interested or very interested in science (69%).

Youth ministers are often asked questions about science by the students in their ministries, with 71% telling us they talk to a student at least once-a-month about science—the most common topic of discussion is the issue of origins and evolution. But in spite of students’ interest, fully one-third of youth ministers never teach their youth about science (32%), and a mere 13% teach about science quarterly or more. The vast majority of youth ministers touch on science just a couple of times per year.

“71%...talk to a student at least once-a-month about science—the most common topic of discussion is the issue of origins and evolution.”

Of those who do teach about science in their ministry, the most prepare their own lessons (82%), showing clearly that they have not found adequate curriculum resources in the market. Sixty percent of youth ministers report that they are not satisfied with the published resources on science and religion.

But even more disheartening is what published resources they do turn to. The single most common resource cited was Ken Ham’s *Answers In Genesis* material. Next came various videos and books by evangelical pastor, Rob Bell. And other than those two, it was a potpourri of YouTube videos, TED Talks, websites, Wikipedia, and magazine articles. Several comments to this question show the exasperation of youth ministers:

5. See the full results in Appendix A.

“Youth ministers harbor no great apprehension about science—and their youth want to talk about it—but they are almost completely lacking in compelling resources that they can use to craft lessons for their ministries.”

- “I don’t know of any!”
- “Haven’t really found any”
- “I just use science articles and ‘add the Jesus’ myself”
- “I haven’t really looked all that hard but from the materials I have seen they were pretty weak.”
- “I didn’t know there were any resources on this topic”
- “Can’t find anything that does what I would like to do; almost everything presents evolution as an off-limits topic that we should either directly condemn or dance around. I am a theistic evolutionist so this doesn’t work for me.”
- “I wish I had something to contribute here... I am hoping this research bears great fruit!”
- “I can’t name any!”

In the end, a clear picture emerged from our survey. Youth ministers harbor no great apprehension about science—and their youth want to talk about it—but they are almost completely lacking in compelling resources that they can use to craft lessons for their ministries. It’s not necessarily that youth ministers don’t want to teach about science-and-religion, it’s that they don’t know how to. And they do not sense much urgency to change that.

Focus Group Results

Our qualitative research consisted of focus groups run by senior research fellow, Erik Leafblad. Over the course of two months in the spring of 2014, he conducted 16 focus groups with youth ministers (two each in Chicago, Kansas City, Los Angeles, San Diego, Phoenix, Princeton, Nashville, and Minneapolis) and five focus groups with youth (in Kansas City, San Diego, Phoenix, Philadelphia, and Nashville).

The youth ministers represented a wide range of theological and denominational commitments. Among the commonalities across the spectrum was a notable silence about science in most of their congregations, and when science is spoken of or taught about, it is usually provoked by some form of crisis.

Based on the responses, we analyzed the focus group transcripts by dividing the youth ministers into three theological camps: liberal, moderate, and conservative. This categorization accurately reflects both the groups’ self-sorting and the affinities of their answers regardless of geography.

Liberal Youth Ministers

Among the liberal youth ministers, there was a sense of resignation. The scientific framework is dominant, and affirmations of faith have taken a back seat. One said, “I wish there were some type of conflict, but science has just won the day. There are no questions coming in my group.” Science and religion are not adversaries in these churches. Instead, the Bible and ideas of the supernatural are spoken of in almost apologetic tones. Said another,

I think the bigger issue in science and religion is there’s a cultural assumption that scientific accounts explain away all the phenomena and religious accounts do the same as opposed to having multiple kinds of explanatory discourses about different things and then how they interact.

“When science is spoken of or taught about, it is usually provoked by some form of crisis.”

As opposed to the other groups, the students in these ministries were not most interested in issues of origins and evolution but instead wanted to talk about the biology of sexual identity, medical ethics, ecology, and personal identity in the face of technology. But the gap is that students don't integrate their deep immersion in science and technology with their faith:

"The liberal youth ministers reported that this is their biggest challenge: getting their students to move beyond compartmentalization to see that issues of science and faith overlap and can be considered in an integrated fashion."

I don't think they've been given the tools to think critically and engage critically what they're being taught, so I think they might be able to compartmentalize what they're taught in church and what they're taught in school; however, when they learn science in school, they probably just think of it as like science, not having any sort of overlap in their faith or anything like that.

The liberal youth ministers reported that this is their biggest challenge: getting their students to move beyond compartmentalization to see that issues of science and faith overlap and can be considered in an integrated fashion. As a group, they seemed stumped as to how to facilitate this integration.

Moderate Youth Ministers

The moderate youth ministers in our focus groups came from both mainline and evangelical churches. Among the themes that emerged among the moderates was experience as a reliable framework for their students. One said,

I think their experience is more authoritative and when scripture and their experience butt heads, I see a lot of students who are going to choose their experience... They're seeking experience to resolve those issues... Like if they cannot observe it, if they can't experience this truth, then why should they care?

This posture necessarily leads to ambiguity, especially when the students' experience does not jibe with either biblical or scientific affirmations.

"Discipleship and personal piety were important aspects of the adolescent faith journey to [moderate] youth ministers, and science was utilized insofar as it bolstered these elements"

Discipleship and personal piety were important aspects of the adolescent faith journey to this group of youth ministers, and science was utilized insofar as it bolstered these elements. If, for example, a study of the cosmos provokes awe in youth and therefore invigorates their faith, then science is helpful. Beyond that, however, these youth ministers expressed reticence in teaching about science. Being that they serve centrist churches, issues like origins and evolution seem too controversial. One said:

In the contexts I've served, there's been this underlying assumption that—at least this is my impression—"Well, we're a church and we obviously believe in creation, and therefore that means we don't believe in evolution, but we're not gonna talk about that."

Another told us:

I just wonder if other youth workers that I have interactions with even wonder if it's safe to have conversations on evolution in their churches because there is a plethora of views on that. And, you know, you can literally get fired if you say something wrong in some contexts. So I think there is fear about having those conversations.

It is disorienting for students when you show them that there's more than one creation story and things are done in a different order, because that is very different from the play they memorized when they were four years old. So if I start teaching this hermeneutic, how are all the parents going to respond to me saying "That's a myth"?

"The moderate youth ministers did not have the sense of resignation of the liberal group nor the overt antagonism of the conservatives. Instead, they exhibited a general sense of unease."

The moderate youth ministers did not have the sense of resignation of the liberal group nor the overt antagonism of the conservatives. Instead, they exhibited a general sense of unease. They embrace evolution, but they worry that their students' parents are creationists. They want to talk about GLBT issues and the biology of sexuality, but they don't want to get in trouble with the senior pastor. And lacking thoughtful resources that engage science and faith, they simply avoid the topic.

Conservative Youth Ministers

These days, doubt is not anathema in American youth ministry. As evidence of this, even the conservative youth ministers testified to the fact that they want their ministries to be safe places for students to express and wrestle with their doubts. In this way, there was overlap between the conservatives and the other two groups.

But in the course of the focus group discussions, it also became clear there differences exist. First, belief in God is a given. This is not a tenet of faith to be doubted:

How does God do that, whether it's miracles and stuff, I don't have a clue. If I could figure that out, I wouldn't need God and as I teach the Bible, that's one of those I want to find the answers to. But there's certain things I don't get, I don't understand, and I want students to know. And, you know, for me it drives me back to God.

"In a discussion with science—or any other non-theological mode of discourse—the Bible gets the first and last words [among conservative youth ministers]."

And second, the Bible is the foundation for every aspect of faith and ministry. In a discussion with science—or any other non-theological mode of discourse—the Bible gets the first and last words.

What that means practically is that a dialogue with science will only be entertained as long as science corroborates theism and the biblical witness. But when it doesn't, then science is jettisoned in favor of God and the Bible. As one youth worker told us, "When [science's] content supports something that scripture's said forever, then it's a bonus."

In this way, science is sometimes used as a tool of apologetics. But more often, the stance is one of hostility. These youth workers are suspicious of or even outright antagonistic toward American culture writ large, and science is very much a part of that. One conservative youth minister mentioned the lack of transitional fossils as evidence of science's weaknesses in the face of biblical truth, and another said that miracles are the "moment of impasse" between faith and science.

As one might suspect, the conservative youth ministers were the most suspicious of science. However, they were not totally foreclosed to the idea that science and faith can be in dialogue and can even enhance one another.

Youth Focus Groups

Themes also emerged across the five focus groups we ran with adolescents. One was that they don't necessarily see a conflict between their faith and what they're learning about science. The students from more conservative churches stated that the Bible contradicts

the idea of evolution (“The Bible, first sentence, first three pages totally contradicts the idea of evolution itself,” said one youth), but when it came to other issues of science (biology, medicine, technology), they saw no conflict.

“Some students felt that science was simply another faith system, in some ways complementary to Christianity.”

Some students felt that science was simply another faith system, in some ways complementary to Christianity. Science answers some questions, and Christianity answers others. One teenage boy said,

Because I know this is kind of a clichéd thing, but it’s been said a lot, Christianity is a lot more about who is the creator, and why did he make us. And science is really kind of focused on how and when did things happen. I don’t think that Christianity really comes in conflict with science in the way things were done.

But another theme we found is that are not getting any help at integrating the faith and science at church. Here’s one such exchange:

So how helpful is what you learn in church to your understanding of science?

C: Very little.

K: Not helpful.

E: I don’t think we integrate.

C: Probably can’t help. I mean, if the church completely ignores the scientific facts, that may teach the kids to be like on one side or the other and we don’t want that.

Does the church put them against each other?

C: Not that they intentionally, but they don’t really help the situation, you know.

And here’s another exchange from another focus group:

So how helpful is what you’re learning in church or in youth group for helping your understanding of science?

F: To be honest, I’ve been at church the entirety of my life—I’ve gone to church since I was little—and they don’t really discuss science stuff very often in relation to faith. I think it’s because it’s partially very tricky to talk about. We’ve sort of gone over it a little bit at summer camp.

M: I don’t think it’s common.

F: It’s an uncomfortable topic.

M: It’s not a topic that we talk about often... I think a lot of the time we ignore what science says. I don’t think that it’s talked about very often.

“What we found conclusively from both the youth ministers and the youth is that church is the one place that they just don’t talk about science.”

All the students, whether they were in public schools or private Christian schools, were well-versed in science. One talked about reading books on quantum physics and another talked about watching *Cosmos* on TV; many talked about biology and chemistry classes in school. Science is the air they breathe.

But what we found conclusively from both the youth ministers and the youth is that church is the one place that they just don’t talk about science.

Youth Survey

Finally, surveys were sent home with every youth minister who participated in a focus group, and they administered the five-question survey to their youth in a youth-group setting. Over 1,400 surveys were returned. (See Appendix B.)

“Teenagers don’t feel threatened by science; instead they desire to learn about the relationship of science and faith, and they want to do that at church.”

The results show that youth have a lot of questions about science and faith and they think that the church is a safe place to ask those questions. They were somewhat more ambivalent about whether it would be difficult to be a scientist and a Christian. And while they don’t think that their faith is challenged by science, they do show a great deal of ambivalence about the relationship between the Bible and science.

Again, these results confirm what we found in the youth focus groups: teenagers don’t feel threatened by science; instead they desire to learn about the relationship of science and faith, and they want to do that at church. The fact that their youth ministers spend so little time on this topic in their ministries cries out for action.

What the Research Reveals About Teenagers and Transcendence

“We’ve become convinced that faith and science cannot be just another isolated topic area in youth ministry programs (like bullying or sex or texting) but rather is a symptom of a greater transition that is affecting every part of youth ministry and the church as a whole.”

Upon completing this research and placing it alongside the landscape of contemporary youth ministry, it seems to us that the issues are much greater than merely fostering a conversation between faith and science. We’ve become convinced that faith and science cannot be just another isolated topic area in youth ministry programs (like bullying or sex or texting) but rather is a symptom of a greater transition that is affecting every part of youth ministry and the church as a whole.

Young people themselves seem to understand—or better, to feel—this transition more than their youth ministers. This is not to say that youth pastors are unaware of this transition; it is just so large that they quickly default to programs and procedures of church management and to fears of raising potentially controversial issues. Therefore, we believe that more is needed than simply funding a resource that youth ministers might take from a shelf and use, adding a week or two on faith and science in their teaching curriculum. When youth pastors imagine faith and science in such a way, they are ambivalent and show little interest in the topic, mentioning greater needs.

But when faith-and-science is seen as the symptom of a greater transition, youth pastors are both engaged and greatly dismayed by the challenges before them. For example, one leading voice in the youth ministry resource world, who served as a host for one of our focus groups, expressed his contention that youth pastors cared little about science, only to recant after our focus groups, immediately asking us to present at his national event. He said, “I honestly didn’t see it, but now I think I recognize how central the science and faith conversation is for youth ministry.”

This transition, we believe, is best represented as the “immanent frame,” articulated by Charles Taylor. Those of us on the research team had read Taylor prior to this project, but his thesis in *The Secular Age* was not consciously influential on the construction of our method or even our conceptions of the state of youth ministry. And yet, after combing through our interviews and surveys, Taylor’s framework repeatedly came up in our conversations. As we analyzed the data, it not only helped us understand the experiences of youth and youth pastors, but also helped us spot the shortcomings of many youth ministry programs and initiatives that are seeking to resource youth pastors and build faith in young people.

“In the modern West, we have ‘sloughed off transcendence’ in favor of immanence... We have faith in science, and unbelief in the divine is, for the first time in millennia, a very real option for everyone.”

Taylor summarizes the enormity of the transition by asking, “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”⁶ His answer is the immanent frame. In the modern West, we have “sloughed off transcendence” in favor of immanence.⁷ We prefer logical, empirical explanations of phenomena to supernatural ones. We have faith in science, and unbelief in the divine is, for the first time in millennia, a very real option for everyone.

And when it comes to science-and-faith, the possibility of unbelief is what youth cannot avoid and youth pastors try to avoid.

6. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*: (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 25.

7. Taylor, 543.

Science, to youth pastors, is an arrow of immanence, shot at the balloon of adolescent faith, puncturing it and ultimately deflating belief. Programs and resources popular among youth ministers promise a material to coat this balloon of faith with a substance impervious to the arrows of immanence. Because of their location inside ecclesial structures, programs like these, combined with youth ministers' own preconceptions about faith and truth, lead youth ministers to misconstrue the immanence of science simply as a threatening projectile.

But young people do not feel this way. To them the immanent frame is not a foreign and challenging worldview, but the very air they breathe. None of the young persons we interviewed challenged the immanence of science. For them, the issue is not how to protect themselves with an impermeable barrier. Instead, they are concerned with how, swimming so deep in cultural/societal waters of immanence, they can possibly believe in God and have any faith at all in transcendence and the supernatural.

The very starting points are different between youth and youth ministers. The youth ministers assume a framework where faith is a given as long as young people assert belief. Their question is how to keep the beliefs of young people from being eroded by science and secularity. This, ironically, made direct discussions with science in church and youth ministries unnecessary: why introduce a topic that may lead to more flying arrows when your job is to protect the faith of young people?

“Young people wonder how, in a world of science and secularity, they can possibly have faith.”

Youth, on the other hand, unknowingly affirmed Taylor by reversing the issue, saying that their *de facto* reality is an environment without the necessity of God. Young people wonder how, in a world of science and secularity, they can possibly have faith. Sure, they have *beliefs*, but they wonder if *faith* and *God* are among those beliefs.

Young people understand that the plurality and tolerance of the present cultural environment allows them to continue holding to their own individual beliefs. But they wonder more existentially if moving fully into the immanent frame as they age will inescapably make faith and God lack *believability*, forcing them to abandon their juvenile beliefs. It is this very possibility of abandonment that most church-based curricula seek to squelch, hoping instead to discover ways for beliefs to become stickier and more impervious to attack. But they attempt this by trying to bolster beliefs in a faith that they assume is a given, which it most clearly is not. These curricula give almost no attention offered to the depth of the immanent frame, which strikes not at individual beliefs, but at the believability in transcendence at all.

These programs, many of which are listed in our literature review, and the youth pastors we interviewed, erroneously contend that belief equals faith.⁸ But Taylor says that this is to misunderstand our time. This is to get the conversation caught in what he calls “secular 2.” Secular 2 was the fundamental frame of the secularization theory of sociology, holding that “beliefs” are the measure of religious engagement; the idea being that the more modern a society becomes the less “beliefs” in God become necessary.⁹ Faith is a given of expressed beliefs that correlate (or not) with institutional participation. Most youth ministry curricula can take faith as a given because they unreflectively allow sociology to set the epistemological terms for their project, imagining that beliefs equal faith.

8. See Appendix C.

9. Secularization theory and Secular 2 has been shown to be problematic and is no longer sociological dogma.

“Faith, beyond the epistemologies of sociology (in spirituality, theology, mysticism), is more essentially an experience with transcendence.”

But these conceptions of belief unknowingly bend-the-knee to the immanent frame, making faith a balloon of beliefs and thereby stripping it of transcendence. They measure religious institutional engagement, calling it faith, never conceptualizing how faith itself is something that cannot be measured solely by the instruments in the immanent frame.

Faith, beyond the epistemologies of sociology (in spirituality, theology, mysticism), is more essentially an *experience with transcendence*. These curricula have ironically succumbed to the immanent frame by assuming faith equals beliefs and participation, saying very little about transcendence.¹⁰

Young people have no problem asserting that they have faith when it is flattened to beliefs and participation in religious institutions—this is how youth spoke to us about faith and how they spoke in the landmark National Study of Youth and Religion.¹¹ But this will always be precarious because the immanent frame, while allowing them to continue with their individual beliefs, will become a tumor of unbelievability, growing in any Western youth. The young people we interviewed sense this, contending that what the church encourages them to believe and what is believable in a secular age are very different. They feel as if they can individually manage the tension between their own belief and what is believable. But when in direct dialogue with science in school, they feel a heavy tension. And their youth ministries and churches are not helping them negotiate this tension.

Again, this is not a tension between “science” and “faith,” but a bigger dilemma they feel about living in a world without transcendence. Young people have no problem saying that they can believe (have belief) in both God and science, yet when asked what is more believable, they feel a more direct challenge. For those young people in mainline and liberal congregations, it is more believable to follow science and give in to the immanent frame (their churches have already done so). For the young people in more conservative congregations, the tension in believability is acute. They can manage this when bouncing between church and other spheres in the larger society, like school. As long as faith and science stay in their corners, youth are equipped to manage the distinctives.¹² But when they come together, young people sense the tension and admit that the immanent answers provided by science have won the fight for believability.

“We discovered that the core issues raised by science surround the believability of transcendence”

Therefore, these curricula can never meet their goals. In a world where the issue is not belief and participation but the believability of transcendence itself, they have succumbed to a definition proffered by an immanence-only culture. We discovered that the core issues raised by science surround the believability of transcendence. Young people understand that they can individually believe what the church teaches, but they recognize that the larger society and culture has no interest in—indeed, great skepticism about—the possibility of transcendent experiences. Science is not an arrow threatening to puncture the balloon of faith, but the core delivery system that makes transcendence *un-believable*.

10. This is ironic because evangelicals tend to speak easily of Jesus and a living God. Yet, this is also not surprising because this form of American evangelicalism has its origin in fundamentalism and fundamentalism is a fully immanent religious perspective that seeks not transcendence but a return to a past time of religious socialization.

11. See Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

12. Taylor calls this the “buffered self.”

“Science seems to shake young people free from the rut of their given consent to beliefs as institutional participation to contemplate more deeply the believability of a transcendent and living God.”

“In short, we’re saying that igniting the faith-and-science conversation in youth ministry has the potential to address a much larger issue: what it means to have faith in transcendence in a world of immanence.”

Believability, Taylor says, is “the construal we just live in, without ever being aware of it as a construal, or—for most of us—without ever even formulating it.”¹³ The faith and science conversation is so important in youth ministry because it moves young people into contemplating the believability of faith, God, and transcendence. Science seems to shake young people free from the rut of their given consent to beliefs as institutional participation to contemplate more deeply the believability of a transcendent and living God. This was not a breezy experience for young people, and one that made faith always slippery. But it was ironically a move to actually contemplate transcendence.

What we’re suggesting may seem an oxymoron at first, but our research bears it out: *injecting the subject of science into youth ministry actually catalyzes students to think about transcendence and God.*

When framed by immanence, faith cannot be anything but slippery. To take the immanent frame seriously means recognizing that faith in transcendence will always be doubted, contested, and deconstructed of its enchantment. We believe that moving the science and faith conversation deeply into youth ministry will help youth and youth workers contemplate ways of exploring the possibility of transcendence, making faith not measured by commitments to belief and participation, but instead explorations of the depth of reality and the mystery of being itself. Our research found an the absence of this kind of exploration in the youth ministry world.

In short, we’re saying that igniting the faith-and-science conversation in youth ministry has the potential to address a much larger issue: what it means to have faith in transcendence in a world of immanence.

We see this as a great opportunity for a further project. The faith and science conversation with young people is so important because it provokes a dialogue and exploration of the impossibility, even the un-believability, of transcendence within the immanent frame. We believe a conversation with science in relation to faith and theology has the possibility of pulling young people and youth pastors deeper into asking not “What are our beliefs?” but “What is truly believable?,” leading to contemplation about transcendence and the mystery of being. No present youth ministry national program offers such a focus.

We foresee a major initiative that addresses this difference in perspectives between youth and youth ministers; we seek to move the conversation beyond belief measured as religious participation to the more acute tension young people feel surrounding the believability of transcendence itself. We would like to help youth pastors understand the immanent frame of modernity, seeing science not as a virus that gets in the system at faith from a distant rogue hacker, but as the current operating system itself—a system we cannot avoid if we are to operate in the cultures and societies of our Western secular age. Instead of teaching youth to fear the immanence of science, we need to teach youth to work within the immanent frame, always looking for moments of transcendence.

Young people in schools often feel this reality more than youth pastors in churches, yet by shifting the conversation from belief to the believability of transcendence, we will offer a major corrective to youth ministry that we hope will affect the church more broadly. We believe this focus on the believability of transcendence through the faith

13. Taylor, 30.

and science conversation can have broad and deep impact within the youth ministry world. It could not only lead the church to actually confront scientific issues in the church but also help youth pastors reimagine what faith actually is, and how they should imagine their own vocation within the immanent frame itself.

Why Young People? Why Youth Ministry?

We are convinced that youth ministry is the perfect place to explore the possibility of transcendence in the immanent frame for a number of reasons. First, according to Taylor, David Bentley Hart, and others, the immanent frame has often asserted that the foreclosure on the possibility of transcendence is a person's step into maturity; a science without transcendence is purported to be the onset of intellectual adulthood. Because adolescence is, by definition, the time between childhood and the maturity of adulthood, young people feel this tension. Those we interviewed feel a magnetic pull away from the believability of transcendence. This may or may not affect their individual beliefs and institutional participation, but regardless, young people feel the persuasive pull of the immanent frame, ruling out transcendence as an illogical possibility, merely the fantasies of immaturity.

And yet, such a tension is penetrating for adolescents because childhood experiences, which are often soaked in transcendence, still reverberate in their being. These experiences of attachment and mystery are hot, real, and formative. Yet in adolescence they must be contested and met with the cold logic of immanence and its disenchantment with experience itself. A number of the young people we interviewed express this tension, asserting that the immanent frame has no room for their trust in transcendence. Yet they still cling to such experiences of God, albeit tentatively.

"The proximity to the transcendent experiences of childhood and the nascent pull of the immanent frame leads us to deem adolescents the perfect people with whom to explore the possibility of transcendence through staging the science and faith conversation."

The proximity to the transcendent experiences of childhood and the nascent pull of the immanent frame leads us to deem adolescents the perfect people with whom to explore the possibility of transcendence through staging the science and faith conversation.

Taylor explains that there is no turning back from the immanent frame; it is now inevitable, the air we breathe. But even so, the immanent frame is haunted by traces of transcendence and quests for meaning. We contend that adolescence, because of its cultural liminality and its biological/developmental unfolding, is a natural time of haunting. That is, teenagers are haunted by the possibility of God. Adolescents are often in a deep search for meaning, too nascent in the immanent frame to not question its presumptions, experiencing the haunting of their own being by something more than the immanent through popular art, emotive feelings of love/rejection, and the need for belonging. There are ways, Taylor explains, that even immersed in the immanent frame, skylights to the transcendent are opened, and we believe these windows are particularly wide in adolescence, making a project that explores transcendence in the immanent frame through youth ministry advantageous.

"There are ways, Taylor explains, that even immersed in the immanent frame, skylights to the transcendent are opened, and we believe these windows are particularly wide in adolescence."

Through our research we discovered that adolescents are particularly affected by what Taylor calls "cross-pressure;" they are being pushed downstream by the currents of the immanent frame, but nevertheless hit rocks of meaning, significance, and longings for transcendence. The swift current of the waters of immanence, coupled with the boulders of needed meaning and significance beyond immanence, create rapids of cross-pressure. Adolescence is *the* time in life where one is pushed into the heavy rapids of cross-pressure. Nearly all the young people we interviewed expressed their experience of cross-pressure, explaining that most often they simply ride the currents of immanence, not even knowing there is another option.

Yet around issues of death, loss, and hope, nearly all the young people spoke of the need for transcendence. They explained that science and immanence were the default, but when various experiences came their way, they felt cross-pressure and sought transcendence. This turn to transcendence in times of death and loss could be interpreted as the “divine butler and cosmic therapist” theory of God, believing that adolescents only turn to transcendence because they encounter a gap in the immanent frame itself.¹⁴ Over time, it could be interpreted, young people will mature and find the strength to not turn to such transcendent fantasies when perplexed.

“Experiences of death, loss, and the need for hope reveal the inadequacy of immanence as a totalizing framework for the human experience, fencing us off from transcendence.”

We obviously see this differently, believing that such experiences of death, loss, and the need for hope reveal the inadequacy of immanence as a totalizing framework for the human experience, fencing us off from transcendence. The young people we interviewed were not shy to speak of the cross-pressure they felt. This was not a debate between beliefs—they saw no conflict between belief in science and God—but a pressure between embracing reality as a place where transcendence could occur at all, or not.

Young people feel the cross-pressure, but the church offers them little help in understanding their experiences of transcendence, wanting instead to bolster their *beliefs* as opposed to joining them in the rapids of the cross-pressure. Again, we believe that the continuation of our project will be unique in using the faith and science dialogue to enter with resources and conversations that can join young people’s experience of cross-pressure. We can offer ways to think about transcendence through an epistemology that works within the immanent frame, but nevertheless seeks skylights to transcendence.

We hope to provide forums for youth ministers to actually understand and embrace the cross-pressure that young people clearly expressed in our interviews, and youth pastors seemed unable to articulate. Unlike other curricula, we see this cross-pressure not as a threat to faith, but *as the possibility for it*. As Taylor expresses, cross-pressure does not necessarily come from immanence or transcendence but rather as a pressure “between the draw of narratives of closed immanence on one side, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other.”¹⁵

We hold that the science-and-faith dialogue in youth ministry can stage an important conversation that young people desire. They feel that the immanent frame alone cannot contend with the mystery of their being. And yet because the church and youth ministries have confused belief for believability, they are incompetent resources. Faith and science in conversation unveils the inadequacy of an immanence that lacks transcendence and a faith that has turned to beliefs and participation out of fear of the contestation of transcendence.

“The church has mistakenly held that cross-pressure is a threat to the faith of young people. Rather than a threat to faith, doubt is a bright flare that the immanent frame itself cannot bear the depth of human experience.”

The church has mistakenly held that cross-pressure is a threat to the faith of young people. Rather than a threat to faith, doubt is a bright flare that the immanent frame itself cannot bear the depth of human experience. After talking with young people, it is clear that religious institutions come under critique not because they claim skylights to transcendence but rather because *they hid or demonized cross-pressure, believing it possible to have faith somewhere outside this pressure*. Yet Taylor and others have shown conclusively that this is impossible.

14. See Christian Smith, 165ff.

15. Taylor, 103.

“Our obsession with technology confuses us into contending that material manipulation and practical instrumentality is the core of our existence.”

A second reason we believe that transcendence in the immanent frame is important to explore with adolescents follows David Bentley Hart. We saw clearly in our research how a technological obsession in the immanent frame is borne on the backs of adolescents. Technology and adolescence seem, in our cultural context, to go together neatly: to be young is to be technologically savvy. But technology is not benign. Rather, our Western obsession with technology makes us overly attracted to practical mastery, distracting us from contemplating the mystery of being. Our obsession with technology confuses us into contending that material manipulation and practical instrumentality is the core of our existence.

Following Hart, we define technology as science used for functional/instrumental ends; technology is science fully given to serve the immanent frame, casing the immanent frame in a consumer functionality that threatens to make transcendence not only unnecessary but boring. This headlong turn to practical mastery becomes a kind of thick rubber raft that hides people from cross-pressure, keeping them from even recognizing that they are floating in a stream of fast moving rapids. Technology essentially protects people from ever hitting the boulders of meaning, distracting them from the rapids of cross-pressure and thus never having to contemplate the mystery of being.

The young people we interviewed live within this strain, sometimes willing to float directly in the rapids-filled stream of cross-pressure, and other times hiding from their being in a rubber raft of technology. In other words, at times they are open to contemplating their being, speaking eloquently of cross-pressure and their yearning for transcendence in the stream of immanence. And at other times their immersion in practical mastery makes their responses boring and flat—science, as well as their own being, become nothing more than apps, computers, and other consumer goods, getting them from one day to the next.

We discovered this most directly in a focus group question that asked young people to talk about what they would do if a huge meteorite was hurtling toward Earth—would they pray to God or turn to scientists to save the world? We felt that this would be the right question to begin our focus groups, hoping it would launch the group into energetic conversation. To our surprise, it never did. Instead, when the question was posed, energy actually left the room. The young people could only view the question through the technological. The question seemed to flip a switch in them that led away from questions of transcendence and the mystery of being into cold practical mastery and instrumental functionality. The meteorite never led them to ask questions about human existence or the goodness of God, only about the practical functionality of solving a technical problem.

“Not only is transcendence under threat but so too is science, for youth too often see science as nothing more than functional technology.”

This leads us to contend that not only is transcendence under threat but so too is science, for youth too often see science as nothing more than *functional technology*. The faith-and-science conversation in youth ministry is important and worth funding because not only does it stage a conversation about the possibility of transcendence in the immanent frame, but it also invites young people to see science as the invitation to contemplate the mystery of being itself. Opening conversation about consciousness, neuroscience, origins, and biological and technological ethics can shake young people awake from the stagnation of technical functionality. This ultimately means that moving forward, our project will have to find ways to escape the trap of technological functionality, pushing young people to contemplate the mystery of being by inviting youth ministers to do the same through questions of faith and science.

“Our project will need to shake youth ministry free from its own infatuation with the practical mastery of the technological.”

To do this, we will need to shake the very underpinnings upon which contemporary youth ministry rests. American youth ministry is in enough flux that these underpinnings are ready to be upended. Nevertheless, our project will need to shake youth ministry free from its own infatuation with the practical mastery of the technological. Others have been so successful in the youth ministry world because, for all intents and purposes, they have taken the shape of a technology, wishing not to contemplate the mystery of being (and the conundrums of transcendence) but to provide digestible resources that can offer the practical mastery of reinforcing beliefs and institutional commitment. Our own programs, resources, and events will no doubt need to offer help and skills to youth workers, but unlike other resources, we will avoid the temptation to provide youth workers (and youth) with functional technologies of faith formation, turning them instead to contemplation of the mystery of being.

How We Propose To Change the Conversation in Youth Ministry

As mentioned, the broader youth ministry world is in flux. This, we believe, makes it an ideal time for a sea change in the practice of youth ministry itself, and we believe this project can move in this very direction. We feel quite confident that we have a unique team of people on board to bring about such a change. Tony Jones and Andrew Root have been deeply involved in the national (and international) youth ministry conversation for decades. This movement to transcendence will fit nicely with the approaches and direction of their work, and the thousands of youth workers who have read their writings have been primed for just such a conversation. Root particularly has been pushing, in both youth ministry scholarship and popular conceptions, to see the practice through the framework of revelation (see *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, and more). Jones through his early work in youth ministry, has been known for his philosophical insights and attention to practices that open young people to experiences of transcendence (see *Postmodern Youth Ministry* and *Soul Shaper*). David Wood has a unique understanding of the science and faith conversation and is able to articulately translate such discussions for the local church.

Together, we are just the people to bring such a bold reimagining of youth ministry through catalyzing the faith-and-science conversation. Our three-person team also represents a very nice mix of publishing and event connections (Jones: Fortress Press and JoPa Productions), local church and grant connections (Wood: senior pastor and former Templeton board member) and academic communities (Root: Luther Seminary). The three of us offer a unique fusion of academic credibility, intellectual capacity, and connection to practitioners. The three of us also have significant connections and are trusted across the continuum of moderate evangelicals to mainliners.

A Road Map to Change

“Yet our own wealth of experience cautions us against naiveté; we understand that bringing change is no simple task.”

Our own connections in the youth ministry and academic worlds will place us in the right circles to bring change. Yet our own wealth of experience cautions us against naiveté; we understand that bringing change is no simple task. What we’ve learned from our experience is that change must come in a number of different modes. Only by moving within these many modes can we break through the noise in the youth ministry world and have significant impact. The key to bringing substantial change, most especially that takes a turn to the depth of the transcendence, is to create a conversation that enters some of the big youth ministry events and organizations but is separate enough to give the conversation a feel of gravitas.

Therefore, it will be important for us to create original resources and events for youth and youth workers and also to embed our ideas and perspectives taken in existing programs and events. This shows that we are not simply another perspective in a noisy youth ministry world. Ours is an essential conversation, created independently but working cooperatively.

This also means that we will need to create direct resources for youth and youth workers, foster existing conversations, and use social media and other digital platforms to offer openings to these conversations.

Finally, to bring lasting change, we need to get inside the classrooms of youth ministry. We will invite the many undergrad and graduate youth ministry programs to consider the issues we are raising, posturing the faith and science conversation as a way of wrestling with transcendence.

Keeping these multiple-foci going will bring deep and lasting change. We believe that this can be evaluated in four ways: 1) the number of youth workers that use our resources with youth, 2) the number youth workers that hear a presentation by us, 3) the number of blogs, tweets, and popular articles that mention our project, 4) the number of youth ministry students that begin imagining ways the science and faith conversation can be engaged in their local context.

What We'll Do

Resources for Youth

- Teaming up with a youth curriculum publishing house (e.g., sparkhouse) we will create a number of short videos on faith and science that youth workers can stream directly from our website. Sparkhouse has a proven track record with creating such videos, and in our preliminary conversations with them they have showed great excitement in working with us. We imagine making these videos free, using them not only to directly assist youth ministry, but also to make youth workers aware of our larger conversation. We see these videos as “just-in-time resources” that will be our gateway into the deeper conversation.
- In the same vein, we see a real need for creating a resource that parents can use at home with their children, particularly with younger teens and tweens, allowing families to enter the conversation.
- Teaming up with Center Youth Ministry Training (CYMT) in Nashville, we will offer a week-long session on faith and science. CYMT has received a substantial Lilly grant to run a youth ministry academy that brings youth and their leaders together to explore intellectual ideas facing the church and Christianity. They have reached out to us, asking whether, in the summer 2015 or 2016, we might focus on science and transcendence. Supporting and leading this event will help us not only explore more deeply the experience of young people, but also test ways and other resources that might be developed throughout the duration of our grant. And partnering with CYMT, we will begin training the next generation of youth workers in this conversation.

Continuing Training for Youth Workers

- It is very important for our theory of change both that an independent conversation about faith and science is kick-started, and that we partner with the existing major players in youth ministry. When it comes to the independent conversation, we imagine offering a semi-annual Writing Symposium at Luther Seminary on issues of faith and science. We envision inviting a dozen or so deep-thinking practitioners to come and enjoy two days of discussion with a top theologian or scientist. We will then help each of these participants write a popular article or blog post with the goal of infiltrating the idea construction of the youth ministry world. Every article or post will express that the ideas created at the writing symposium were funded by the John Templeton Foundation and created at Luther Seminary. Such a process will not only create a continued conversation that will underpin our work, but will also be a significant way of bringing change as the ideas we create and publish fill youth ministry publications and websites.
- Teaming up with JoPa Productions, we imagine offering a broader and large youth-ministry-and-science event each year. JoPa has already shown the ability to create a substantial youth ministry event with hundreds of participants. We imagine each year having a different scientific topic in relation to youth ministry as the focus of a conference. Such events live beyond just the 200 to

300 participants, but, through social media, reverberate much more widely in the youth ministry world.

- The largest youth ministry training event, the National Youth Workers Convention (6,000+ youth workers attend), has already approached us about being a central, main stage, focus in 2015 or 2016. Youth Specialties (the organization behind the National Youth Workers Convention) has offered us the opportunity to shape this session. We believe that this will not only deeply expose our work to the youth ministry world, but give it credibility to more conservative evangelicals.
- Teaming up with Fortress Press and/or Templeton Press, we imagine supporting two to three mid-shelf youth ministry books on scientific issues. We believe such mid-shelf texts have had significant impact within the youth ministry world, moving a conversation more deeply within in the practice, especially as they are chosen for youth ministry syllabi.
- We also see a need to continue a smaller-scale study. This study will focus directly on young people's experience of transcendence, and how the immanent frame is affecting them. This study will be important as we continue to provide fresh perspectives to our resource creation and events. We also see how this study and its interviews could feed into the books we support.

The Classroom

- As a way of continuing to learn how such a faith-and-science conversation might become central in the training of youth ministers and meaningful to youth, every year we will offer a science-and-youth-ministry course at Luther Seminary. Luther already has a course offering each year called "Issues in Youth and Family Ministry." This course allows new content to be offered each year. We would like to turn the focus of this course to science and faith issues for at least three years. Inviting in a top scientist or theologian, like David Seigle on neuroscience or David Bentley Hart to discuss new atheism, we will create a space to explore how such scientific findings might connect with youth ministry.
- To further encourage the science and faith conversation in youth ministry classrooms, we imagine offering small mini-grants to youth ministry professors. These grants of \$3,000 to \$5,000 would be used to fund course constructions with scientists or provide resources, etc. We believe this, coupled with direct youth worker initiatives and resources for youth, will create a real culture of change.
- Once or twice over the three year grant, we imagine offering a symposium on youth, science, and transcendence. This would be the gathering of a small group of scholars (10 to 12) across youth ministry, theology, and the sciences to present papers to each other and discuss issues. The impact of such an event will be not only to deepen our intellectual conceptions of the issues, but will also lead to academic articles appearing across field with attention to youth and science. We believe that such change must happen in the idea construction of practitioners, but real culture change demands that intellectual/academic literature too wrestles with these ideas we perceive are so central.

Early Results

As we were writing this white paper we began presenting the results of our research at top youth ministry events.

The first conference we attended was just two months after the grant began—the Progressive Youth Ministry conference in Chicago—and our major objective was to listen. We created two spaces for discussion and conversation. In the first, we invited youth workers to discuss their experience of faith and science in their ministries. Twenty-five people participated, giving some very helpful feedback. The second space was with leaders in the youth ministry world (we funded some of these people's participation in the event, so that we could gather them). About ten such leaders participated, giving us great insight, help, and direction on our research and other important issues to consider. This was a very successful opportunity to listen.

Upon completion of our white paper, we created a presentation and gave it at six key conferences. These presentations actually exceeded our expectations. We were surprised to see the number of attendees as well as the energy that filled the rooms at our presentations. These presentations gave us important feedback on our suspicion that driving issue was the plausibility of transcendence. The excitement and positive feedback of both youth workers and academics was significant.

We gave presentations at both National Youth Workers Conventions. In Sacramento there were 90 participants, and in Atlanta, 110.

We also offered a keynote presentation at a smaller but growing national youth ministry event called The Summit in Nashville. Two hundred fifty people heard this presentation, with another 100 joining for a talk-back session. Their energy and interest was very high.

We gave an academic version of our presentation at the two core academic conferences that gather youth ministry scholars. The Association for Youth Ministry Educators conference met in Washington DC. Of the 100 participants in the conference, 35 came to our presentation, making it the largest breakout paper of the conference. The responses to our presentation were overwhelming, with some scholars asserting that this was the most exciting project in youth ministry in years.

The final event will be a paper presentation to the International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry at their meeting outside London in January, 2015. The major objective of this presentation will be to look forward toward what might be next, as well as to receive feedback.

Conclusion

Providing American youth ministers with resources that will catalyze their teaching on faith and science is not just about making the church a safe place for this conversation. It is that, but it is much more than that. It is, we propose, an invaluable way to crack open the immanent frame to possibilities of transcendence.

“We claim that wholeheartedly embracing science in youth ministry will actually benefit faith, for it will cause youth to ask questions of meaning that science uniquely asks in our current age.”

Paradoxically, we claim that wholeheartedly embracing science in youth ministry will actually benefit faith, for it will cause youth to ask questions of meaning that science uniquely asks in our current age.

This will not be small undertaking. We suggest that the entire enterprise of youth ministry will have to change. And for that to happen, we must have a multi-pronged approach. From seminaries to popular conferences, from academic books to curriculum publishers, all who speak into the content of American youth ministry will have to be convinced of the importance of this project, and they will have to be educated and resourced along the way.

We are confident that this can be done, and that we are the team to do it.

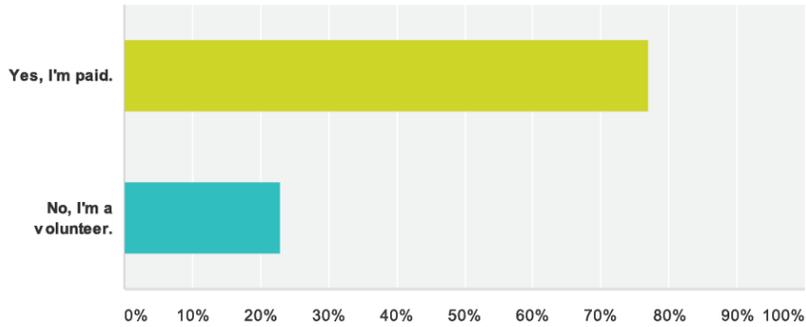
Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Andrew Root
Rev. David Wood
Rev. Dr. Tony Jones

Appendix A—Online Survey Results

Q1 Are you paid to do youth ministry?

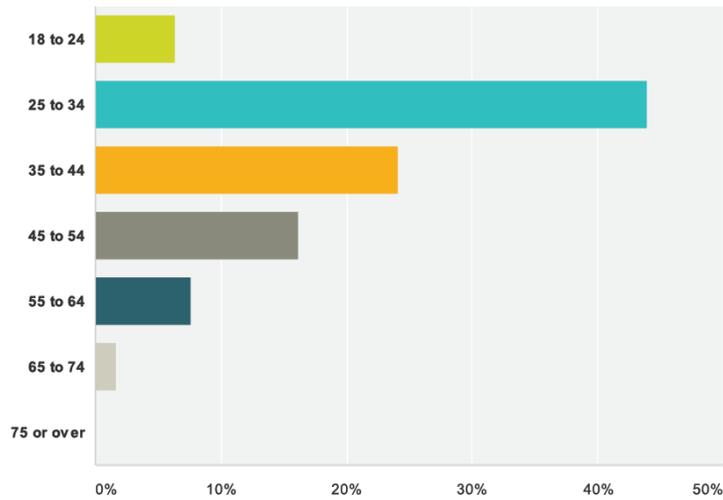
Answered: 758 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Yes, I'm paid.	77.04%	584
No, I'm a volunteer.	22.96%	174
Total		758

Q2 What is your age?

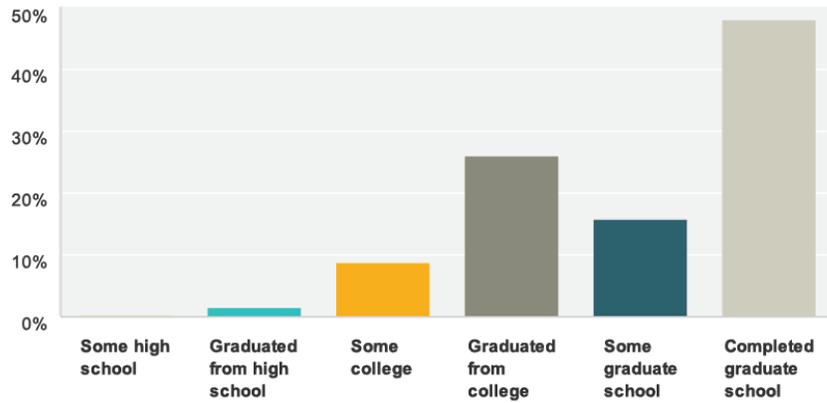
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Answer Choices	Responses	Count
18 to 24	6.33%	48
25 to 34	43.93%	333
35 to 44	24.14%	183
45 to 54	16.23%	123
55 to 64	7.65%	58
65 to 74	1.72%	13
75 or over	0.00%	0
Total		758

Q3 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

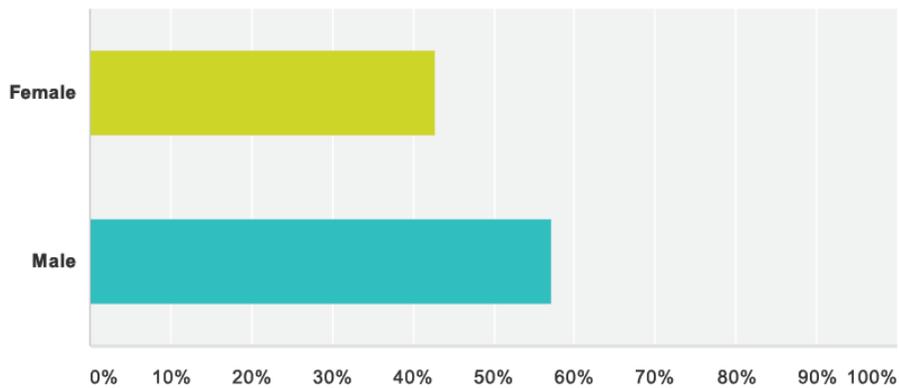
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Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Some high school	0.13%	1
Graduated from high school	1.45%	11
Some college	8.84%	67
Graduated from college	25.99%	197
Some graduate school	15.70%	119
Completed graduate school	47.89%	363
Total		758

Q4 What is your gender?

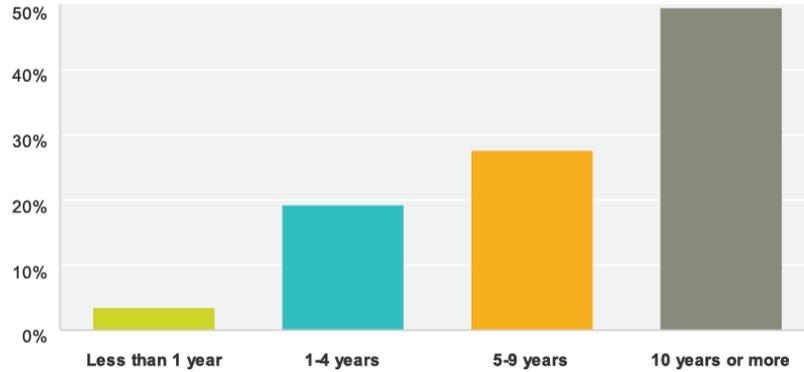
Answered: 749 Skipped: 12



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Female	42.86%	321
Male	57.14%	428
Total		749

Q5 How long have you been involved in youth ministry leadership?

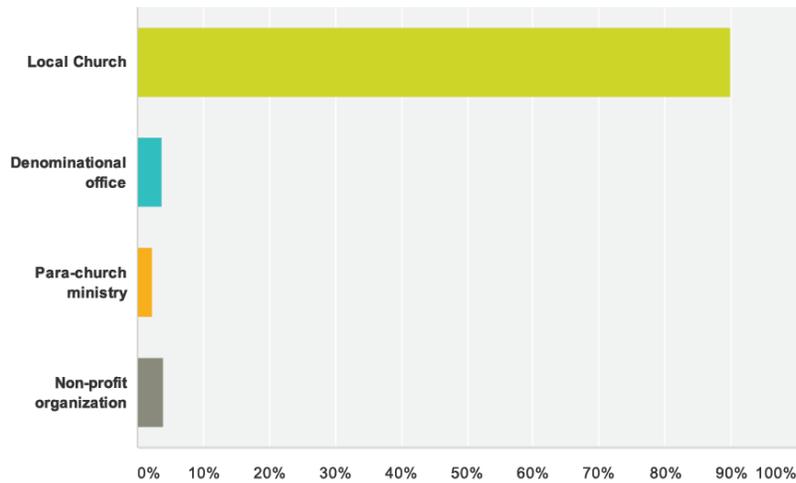
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Answer Choices	Responses	
Less than 1 year	3.56%	27
1-4 years	19.26%	146
5-9 years	27.70%	210
10 years or more	49.47%	375
Total		758

Q6 For what kind of organization do you currently do your primary youth ministry work?

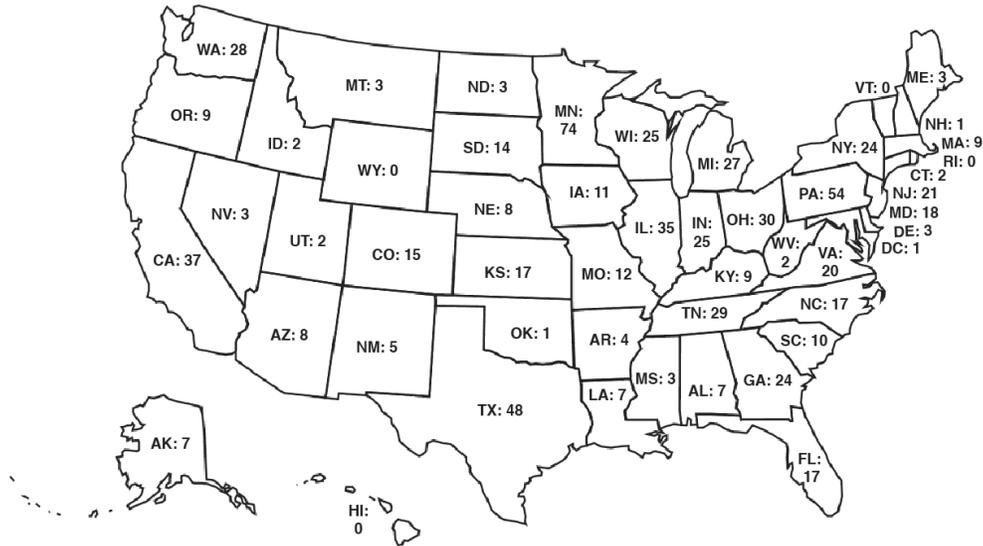
Answered: 758 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses	
Local Church	89.97%	682
Denominational office	3.69%	28
Para-church ministry	2.37%	18
Non-profit organization	3.96%	30
Total		758

Q7 In what state or U.S. territory do you live?

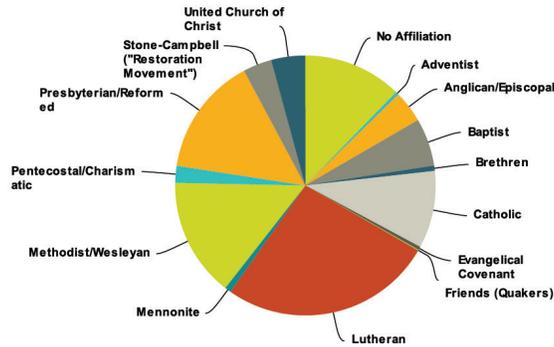
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Other: 30

Q8 What Christian tradition is your youth ministry affiliated with?

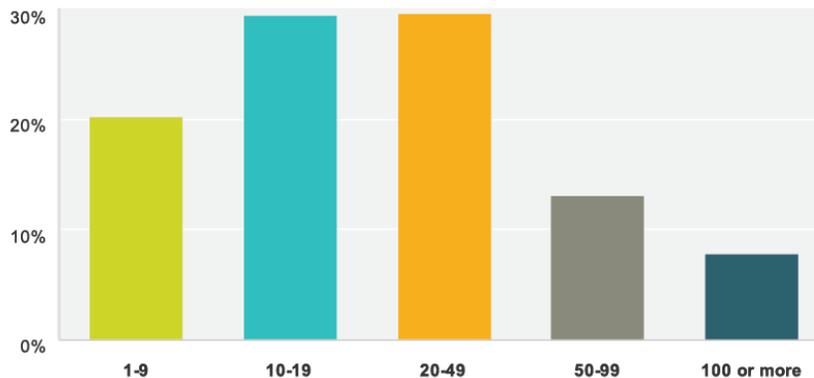
Answered: 758 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses
No Affiliation	12.27% 93
Adventist	0.40% 3
Anglican/Episcopal	3.96% 30
Apostolic/New Apostolic	0.00% 0
Baptist	5.94% 45
Brethren	0.66% 5
Catholic	9.63% 73
Evangelical Covenant	0.40% 3
Friends (Quakers)	0.13% 1
Latter Day Saints	0.00% 0
Lutheran	26.39% 200
Mennonite	0.79% 6
Methodist/Wesleyan	14.78% 112
Orthodox/Eastern Christian	0.00% 0
Pentecostal/Charismatic	2.11% 16
Presbyterian/Reformed	14.78% 112
Stone-Campbell ("Restoration Movement")	3.56% 27
Unitarian-Universalist	0.00% 0
United Church of Christ	4.22% 32
Total	758

Q9 What is the average weekly attendance at your youth group?

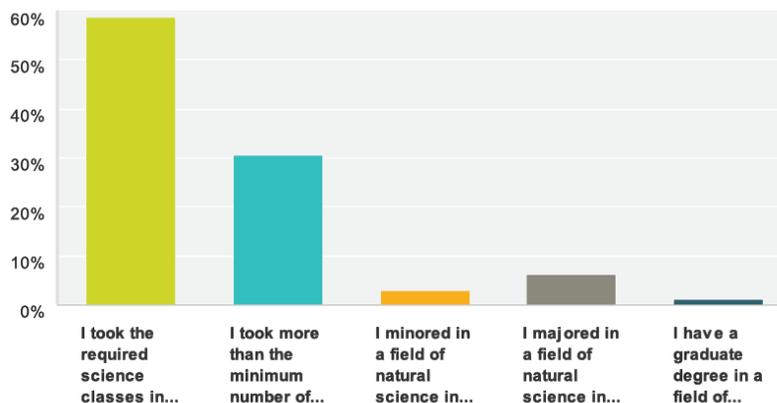
Answered: 758 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses	
1-9	20.18%	153
10-19	29.42%	223
20-49	29.55%	224
50-99	13.06%	99
100 or more	7.78%	59
Total		758

Q10 What educational background do you have in science?

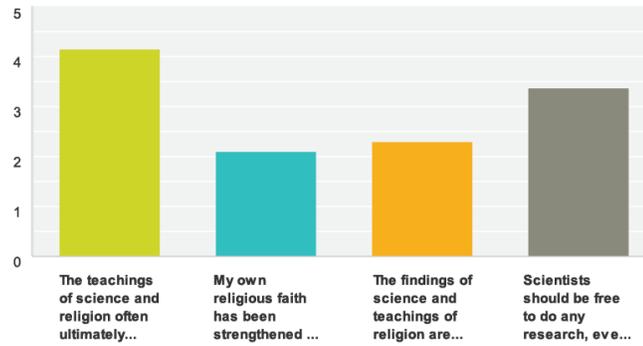
Answered: 758 Skipped: 3



Answer Choices	Responses	
I took the required science classes in school.	58.71%	445
I took more than the minimum number of science classes, but I did not major or minor in a field of natural science.	30.74%	233
I minored in a field of natural science in college.	3.03%	23
I majored in a field of natural science in college.	6.33%	48
I have a graduate degree in a field of natural science.	1.19%	9
Total		758

Q11 Please rank each of the following statements.

Answered: 734 Skipped: 27



	Strongly Agree	(no label)	(no label)	(no label)	Strongly Disagree	Total	Average Rating
The teachings of science and religion often ultimately conflict with each other.	2.32% 17	5.60% 41	14.48% 106	31.15% 228	46.45% 340	732	4.14
My own religious faith has been strengthened by some of the discoveries of science.	37.02% 271	33.74% 247	15.98% 117	7.24% 53	6.01% 44	732	2.11
The findings of science and teachings of religion are entirely compatible with each other.	28.14% 206	35.66% 261	20.90% 153	9.02% 66	6.28% 46	732	2.30
Scientists should be free to do any research, even on controversial subjects like human cloning, without any interference from religious morals or teachings.	9.35% 68	16.92% 123	22.56% 164	29.57% 215	21.60% 157	727	3.37

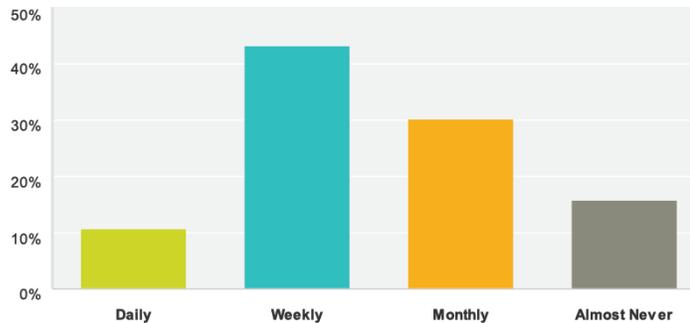
Q12 How interested are you in science?

Answered: 734 Skipped: 27

	Very Interested	(no label)	(no label)	(no label)	Not Interested At All	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	28.20% 207	41.01% 301	20.98% 154	8.58% 63	1.23% 9	734	2.14

Q13 How often do you read an article or blog post about science?

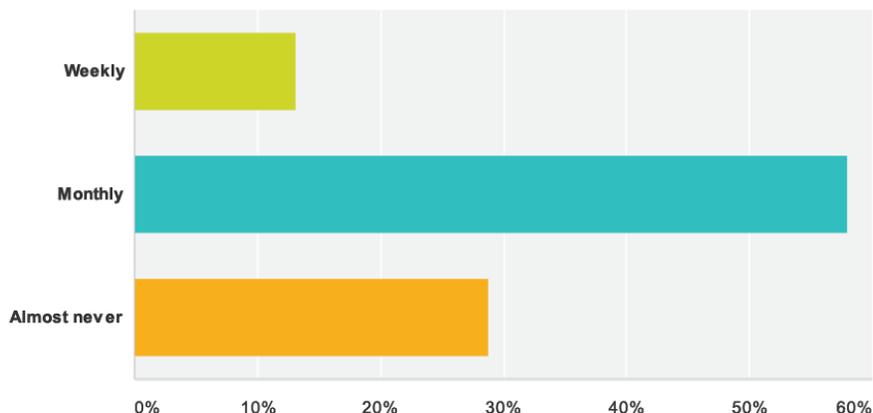
Answered: 734 Skipped: 27



Answer Choices	Responses
Daily	10.76% 79
Weekly	43.19% 317
Monthly	30.25% 222
Almost Never	15.80% 116
Total	734

Q14 On average, how often do you have a conversation with a student in your ministry about science?

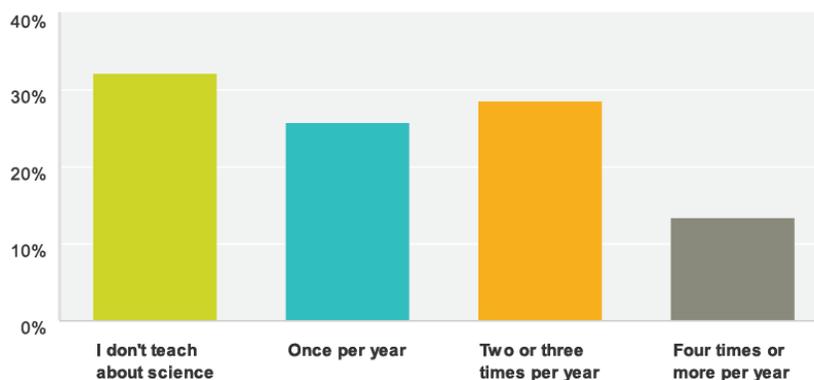
Answered: 698 Skipped: 63



Answer Choices	Responses	
Weekly	13.18%	92
Monthly	58.02%	405
Almost never	28.80%	201
Total		698

Q15 In a year, how many times do you teach a lesson on science in your youth ministry?

Answered: 698 Skipped: 63



Answer Choices	Responses	
I don't teach about science	32.23%	225
Once per year	25.79%	180
Two or three times per year	28.65%	200
Four times or more per year	13.32%	93
Total		698

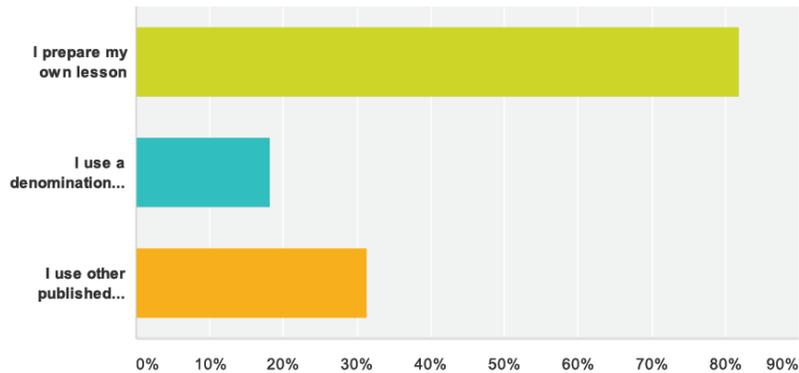
Q16 How confident do you feel teaching about science in your youth ministry?

Answered: 698 Skipped: 63

	Very confident	(no label)	(no label)	(no label)	Not at all confident	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	16.19% 113	34.67% 242	27.08% 189	15.19% 106	6.88% 48	698	2.62

Q17 If you teach about science in your youth ministry, what resources do you use?

Answered: 563 Skipped: 198



Answer Choices	Responses
I prepare my own lesson	81.88% 461
I use a denominational resource	18.29% 103
I use other published curriculum	31.44% 177
Total Respondents: 563	

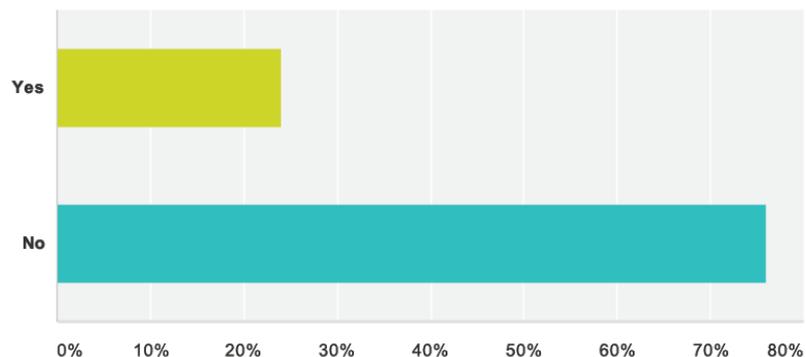
Q18 How satisfied are you with the published youth ministry resources on science and religion?

Answered: 639 Skipped: 122

	Very satisfied	(no label)	(no label)	(no label)	Not at all satisfied	Total	Average Rating
(no label)	1.72% 11	5.48% 35	32.39% 207	33.96% 217	26.45% 169	639	3.78

Q20 Have you ever had a scientist as a guest speaker in your youth ministry?

Answered: 698 Skipped: 63



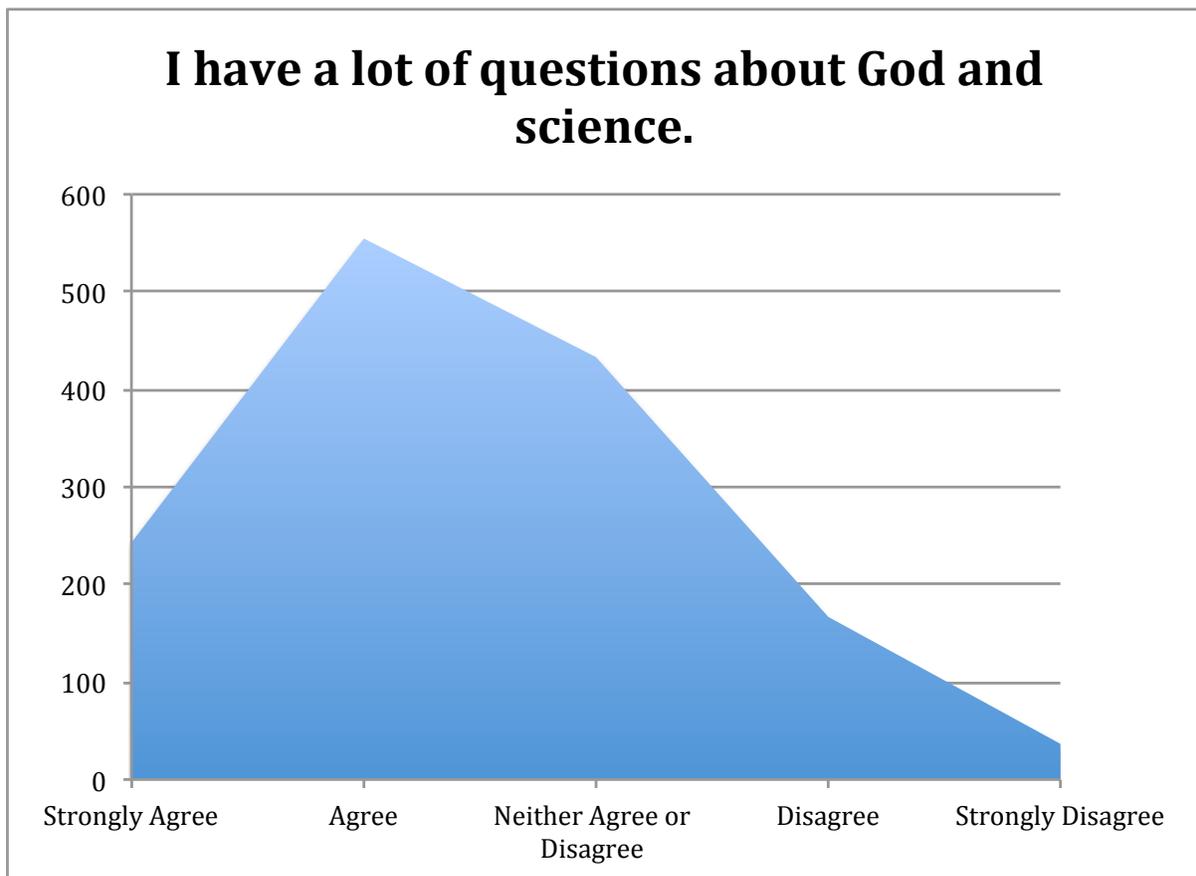
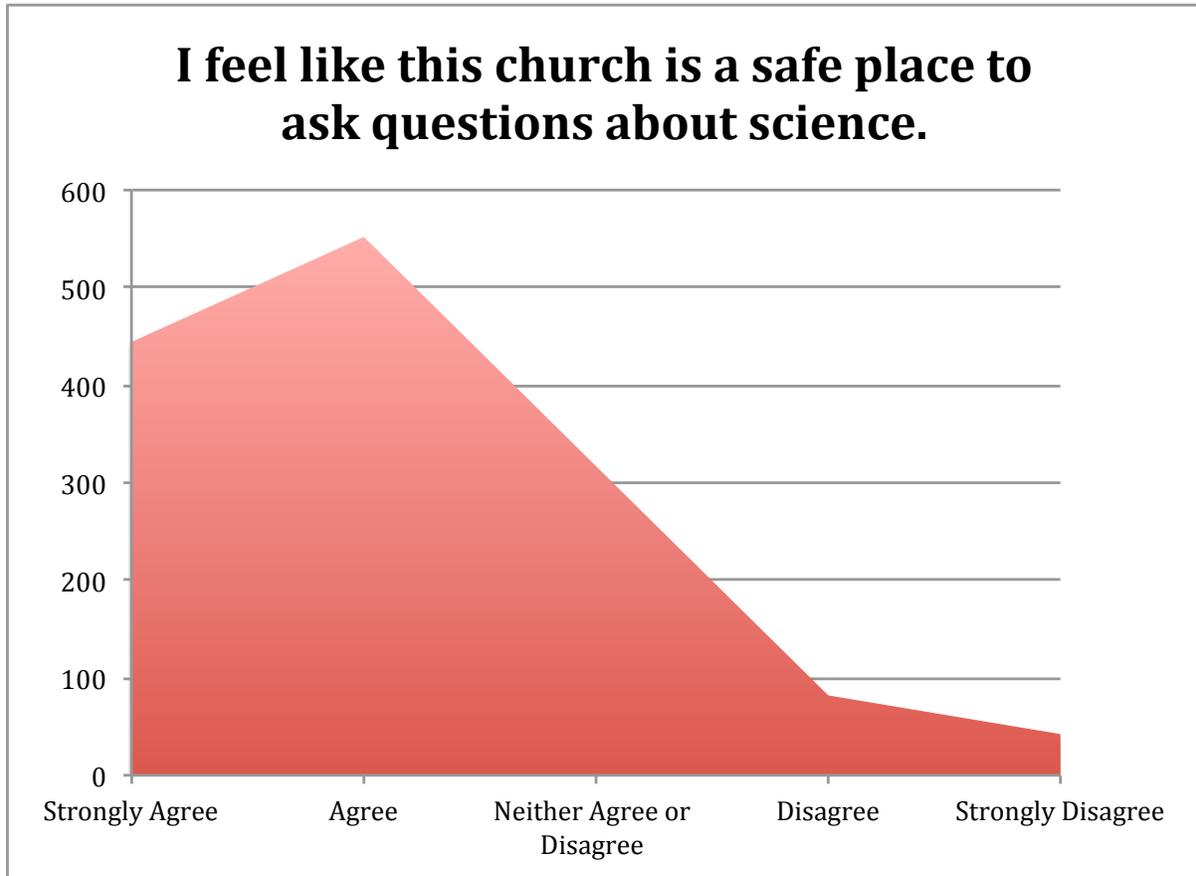
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	24.07%	168
No	75.93%	530
Total		698

Q21 How do you feel about the following statements?

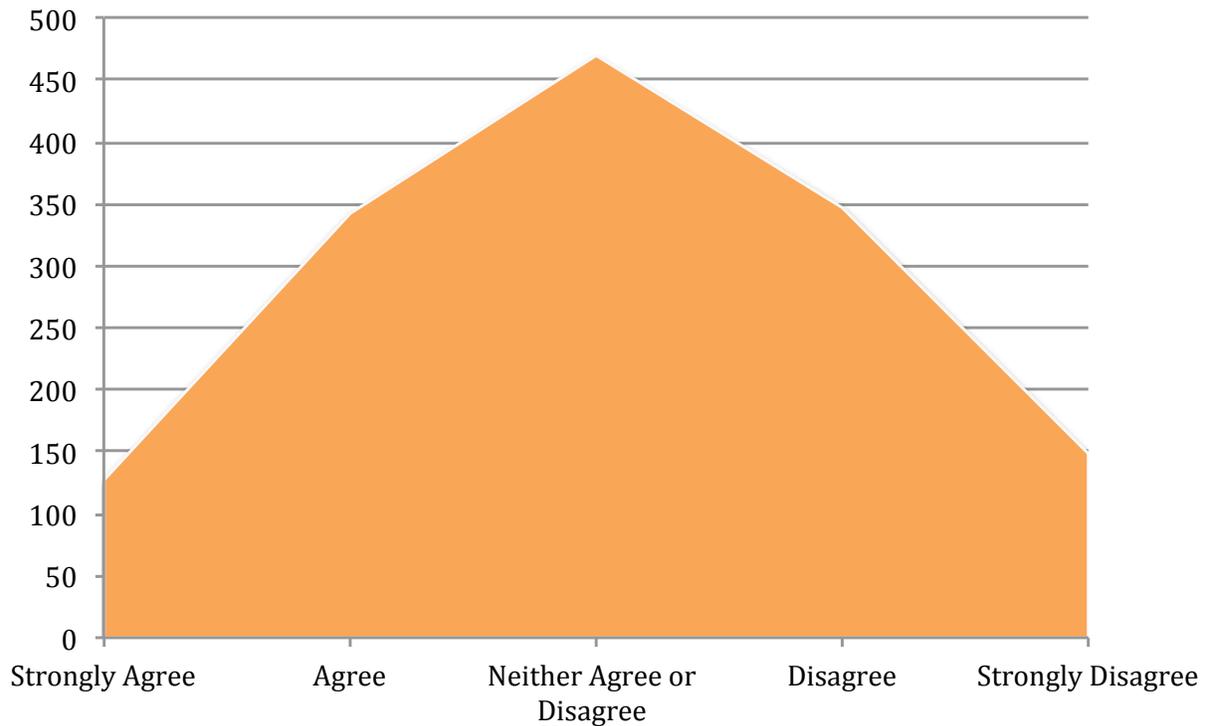
Answered: 656 Skipped: 105

	Strongly Agree	(no label)	(no label)	(no label)	Strongly Disagree	Total	Average Rating
At some point, I have had to compromise what I think about science because of my role at church.	2.74% 18	7.47% 49	9.15% 60	28.96% 190	51.68% 339	656	4.19
A student in my youth group has asked me a question about science that has stumped me.	10.52% 69	28.05% 184	20.27% 133	26.52% 174	14.63% 96	656	3.07
I teach about science at some point every year in the church curriculum.	20.12% 132	27.44% 180	19.05% 125	18.29% 120	15.09% 99	656	2.81
Students in my youth group want to talk about science.	10.98% 72	32.62% 214	36.13% 237	16.77% 110	3.51% 23	656	2.69
Sometimes I'm nervous to talk about science with students in my youth group because I feel like I don't know enough about science.	7.01% 46	19.82% 130	18.75% 123	31.25% 205	23.17% 152	656	3.44
Science is one of the top five issues that my students want to talk about.	5.95% 39	14.94% 98	28.05% 184	32.47% 213	18.60% 122	656	3.43
Students regularly ask me if the Bible is in conflict with science.	8.69% 57	24.54% 161	28.05% 184	25.76% 169	12.96% 85	656	3.10
Evolution versus creation is definitely a hot-button issue for my students.	8.84% 58	21.65% 142	21.95% 144	30.03% 197	17.53% 115	656	3.26
I'm reluctant to talk to kids about science and evolution because I haven't resolved the issue in my own mind.	1.37% 9	5.49% 36	5.64% 37	30.18% 198	57.32% 376	656	4.37
Sometimes I worry that science will answer all the important questions, leaving no room for faith.	0.91% 6	3.20% 21	6.25% 41	23.93% 157	65.70% 431	656	4.50
There will always be questions that science cannot answer.	64.48% 423	26.22% 172	6.25% 41	2.13% 14	0.91% 6	656	1.49
The church's history is overwhelmingly anti-science.	6.10% 40	24.85% 163	28.51% 187	25.46% 167	15.09% 99	656	3.19

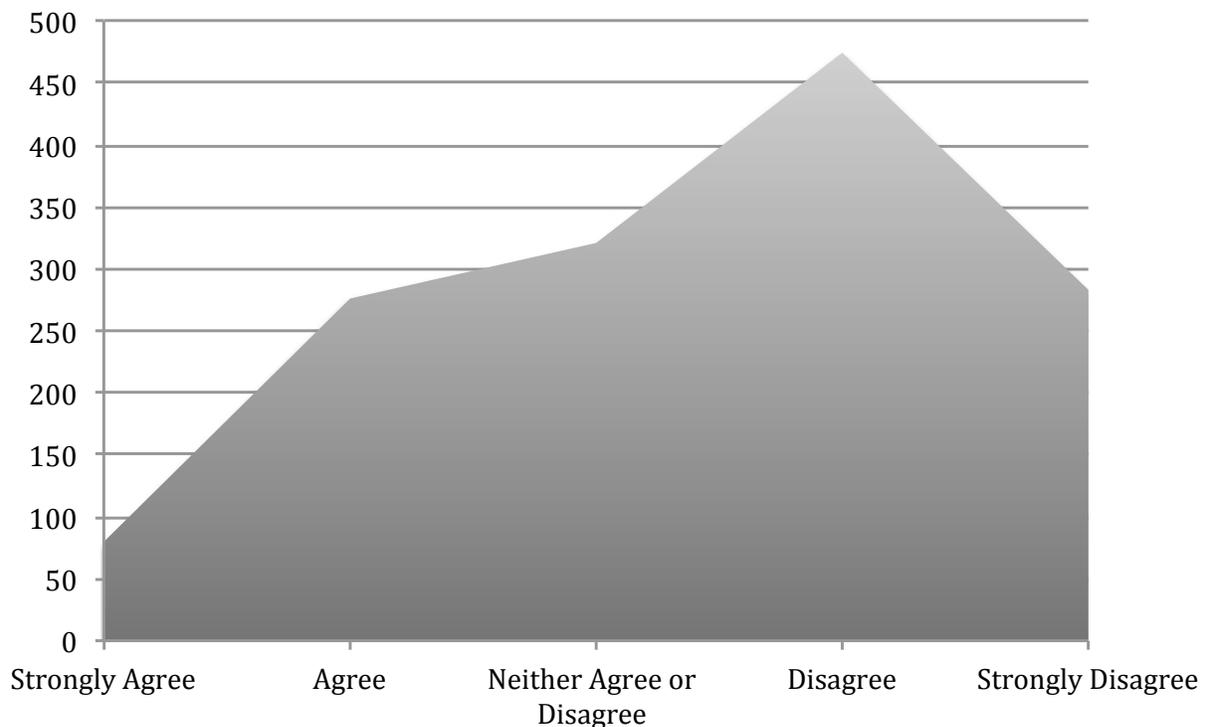
Appendix B—Youth Survey Results



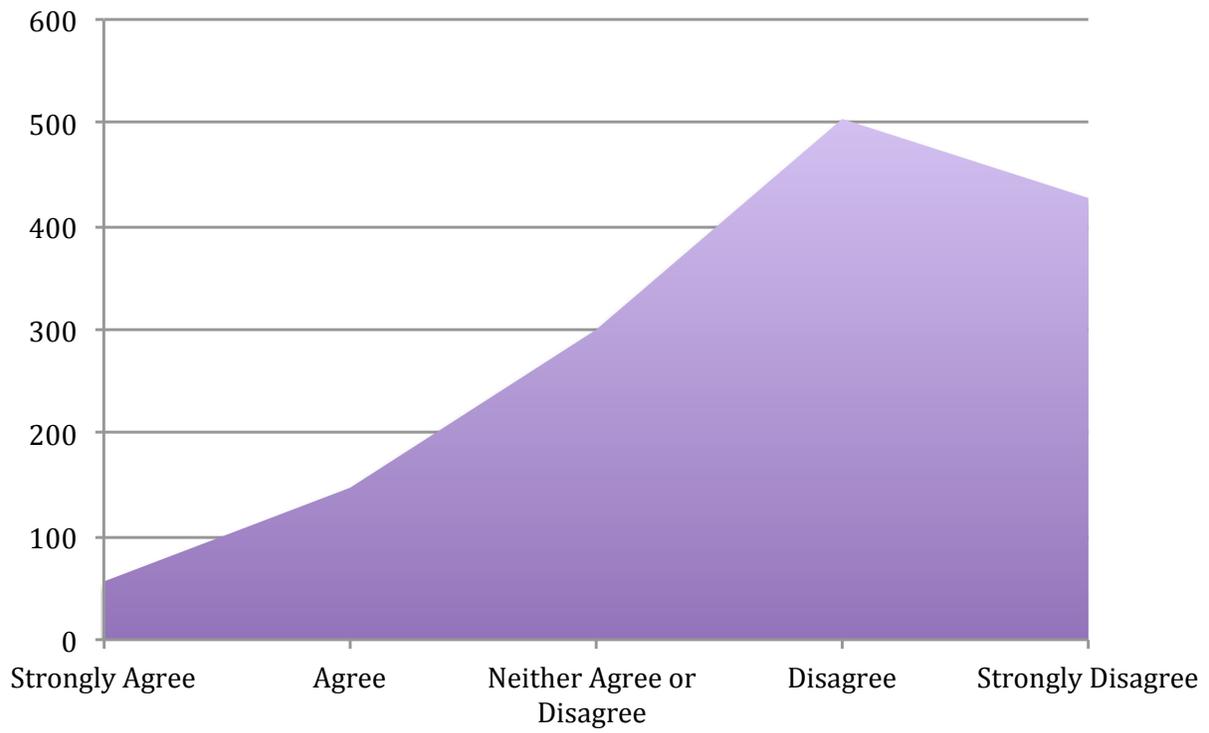
I think the Bible and science are in conflict.



I think it would be hard to be a scientist who is a Christian.



The more I learn about science, the harder it is to be a Christian.



Appendix C—Literature Review

Synthesis and Division:

*A Resource Review for the John Templeton Foundation
Research on Science and Faith in Youth Ministry*

By Wesley W. Ellis

Submitted to

Dr. Andrew Root, Rev. David Wood, and Rev. Dr. Tony Jones

May 15, 2014

The relation of science to religion has been a topic of anxiety and dispute since the dawn of the Enlightenment. Over the centuries, scientists and theologians have vacillated between synthesis and division—between a sense of continuity and a sense of discontinuity between science and religion. These tensions are anything but resolved in our current context and this presents a unique challenge for the Church’s educational ministry. The challenge for Christian educators, ministers, and practical theologians is to aid people in finding appropriate ways of navigating the questions raised by and about science and faith. While much work has already been done for the church’s general context, the resources specifically available to the context of youth ministry are more limited—though the needs are perhaps more pressing as adolescents sort through these questions. According to the Barna Group, one of the reasons young adults are leaving the church is because “Churches come across as antagonistic to science.” They write,

...one of the reasons young adults feel disconnected from church or from faith is the tension they feel between Christianity and science. The most common of the perceptions in this arena is ‘Christians are too confident they know all the answers’ (35%). ‘... churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in’ (29%). ‘...Christianity is anti-science’ (25%). And nearly the same proportion (23%) said they have ‘been turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate.’ Furthermore, the research shows that many science-minded young Christians are struggling to find ways of staying faithful to their beliefs and to their professional calling in science-related industries.¹⁶

It appears that much is at stake in regards to youth ministry’s attention to the relation of faith and science. And yet the limited quantity of resources available to youth workers concerning this issue seems to be equally limited in the scope of its concern. By and large, the resources which do exist are fundamentally preoccupied with human origins and with the existence of God, in the particular framework of the “creation-versus-evolution debate.” Essentially, in terms of intention, there are three types of resources available to youth workers. These are 1) Apologetic resources which preclude a synthesis between creation and evolution and presuppose a particular objective conclusion prior to engaging scientific data, 2) Resources which seek to promote at least a potential and provisional synthesis between creation and evolution and view science as a source for theological reflection and for the construction of theological conclusions, and 3) Resources which are not particularly constructed for youth ministry settings but which too might be utilized therein. The following resource review will provide a basic overview of a representative (not comprehensive) collection of each of these three types of resources for the discussion of science in youth ministry. The first section will review apologetic resources, the second will review resources for synthesis, and the third will examine some general church resources (more oriented toward adult education) that also promote synthesis.¹⁷ Asking what epistemological assumptions are being made in each resource, we will be evaluating these resources for their ability, in terms of their content, to help young people critically and theologically explore the questions raised by science and faith. In doing so, this review hopes to assist in the development of future resources by examining the current field and exposing the existing preoccupations and the implicit omissions present in available resources.

16. The Barna Group, <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>, accessed 5/12/2014.

17. We will prioritize resources which promote synthesis in the third section due to the disproportionate quantity of apologetic youth ministry resources.

Apologetic Resources

Answers in Genesis

Answers in Genesis is an organization founded by Ken Ham, perhaps the most extreme and prominent creationist in the North American context. Through *Answers in Genesis* (AiG), Ham promotes a predominantly literalistic interpretation of the book of Genesis—including a

literal six-day, “young earth” creation account—and imposes that interpretation upon all other biblical, theological, and scientific data. According to their mission statement, “We relate the relevance of a literal Genesis to the church and the world today with creativity.”¹⁸ AiG’s interpretation of Scripture, particularly their literalistic interpretation of the book of Genesis, precedes all their scientific reflection. Science is not so much a resource for theological reflection as it is a tool in the service of substantiating and proving their theological perspective for which the book of Genesis provides the dominant normative claims. Thus, all the resources they provide for youth ministry, which are numerous, are apologetic resources predominately preoccupied with the question of cosmic origins and the defense of the literal interpretation of biblical history in Genesis. AiG offers eight curricula for teens, including “Demolishing Strongholds” (Ages 14 & up) and “Answers Academy” (Grades 7 & up).¹⁹ The scope of AiG is particularly narrow and offers little to no aid for adolescents navigating scientific questions alternative to the questions of scriptural historicity and human origins.

Sword and Spirit

Sword and Spirit is an apologetics website designed for use by teens and young adults to equip them, not necessarily to think scientifically or engage science, but to *use* science, theology, and ethics to “persuade” others of a presupposed truth of the Christian faith.²⁰ They believe that “science and the Christian faith are not mutually exclusive - at all.”²¹ But they are clear that “science is a tool not an absolute truth.”²² As a tool, then, scientific reflection is preceded by a conclusion. As with all apologetic recourses, there is not so much a *hypothesis* as a *thesis*. Scientific evidence is collected to support the thesis but never to construct it or challenge it. In other words, science won’t be a resource for the development of thought, only for the defense of a verdict.

The Toughest Test in College

This video serves as an introduction to Focus on the Family’s “True U” curriculum, providing the essential foundation and purpose for which the curriculum was developed. A dominant presupposition of this resource is that Christianity definitively includes a kind of conservatism, anti-homosexuality, anti-liberalism, anti-evolution, and biblical inerrancy.²³

This curriculum presupposes both social and theological conservatism and a deep suspicion concerning the motives of college educators, and an even deeper suspicion of the “elite” schools. They even promote a suspicion concerning Christian college education; saying, “Christian colleges can be very dangerous...”²⁴ Its objective is to prepare conservative Christian students

18. Answers in Genesis, <http://www.answersingenesis.org/about/mission>, accessed 4/4/2014.

19. Answers in Genesis, <http://www.answersingenesis.org/cec/curricula> accessed 4/4/14.

20. Sword and Spirit, <http://www.swordandspirit.com/philo/main.html>, accessed 4/4/14.

21. Ibid, <http://www.swordandspirit.com/library/writings/science/main.html> accessed 4/4/14.

22. Ibid.

23. Focus On The Family, “The Toughest Test in College,” 4:35-4:38.

24. Ibid, 4:38-4:41.

entering college to oppose college educators who do not conform to the Christian “worldview.” It assumes that professors either impose their own bias upon students or that they will likely conceal their own biases and presuppositions and present those biases as the facts of their discipline.

The assumption that educators are generally and indiscriminately atheistic and materialistic also prevails. “The overriding fact of modern academia is that the professorate... are pretty uniformed in their commitment to a secular, materialistic worldview.”²⁵

Beyond simply engaging in critical thinking, *The Toughest Test in College* suspects hostility against a Christian “worldview” from the experts in the academic disciplines. In encouraging and promoting such deep suspicion of college education, their suspicion carries over as strongly or more strongly into scientific discussions. They display suspicion of any scientist or scientific educator who does not conform to a strict notion of intelligent design.

Near the end of the video, Dr. Del Tackett, the President of the Focus on the Family Institute, offers closing remarks,

“...some of this [the hostility of college education toward Christianity] may be a little scary ...that’s actually good. You need to have a healthy fear of those things that can bring devastating consequences into your life. It is my deepest prayer that you do not end up on the casualty list, with deep, deep regrets but it is of greater importance for you to know that you could turn this battle into a joyful and triumphant time in your life. I am convinced that with the strength and wisdom and courage that comes from the Spirit of God, you will find yourself fulfilling what Paul said in Romans 8. That ‘we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.’ But you must be prepared.”²⁶

Evidenced in this statement, the concern of this resource is that if young people are not given proper knowledge about science—in this case, a prepared argument against antagonists—they will leave their faith behind.

TrueU “Does God Exist”

In this video curriculum from Focus on the Family, the objective is to “make a scientific case for the existence of God.”²⁷ Stephen C. Meyer, Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute outside of Seattle, constructs categories of ideology, including among them, theism (i.e. classical theism), deism, naturalism (or “materialism”), and pantheism (which he presents as a more “eastern” idea).²⁸ He identifies these perspectives as “worldviews,” and builds his argument from the presupposition that the world of rational thought is divided into these ideologies. By conflating competing perspectives into flattened categories, Meyer simplifies his task of persuasion in each section. For example, in his discussion on ethics, theism is characterized by an objective reception of moral standards from an authoritative and disciplinarian deity, and naturalism is paired down to a choice between indiscriminate moral relativism and evolutionary ethics.²⁹ He simplifies his task by only having to argue between these two options. By conflating the options, he liberates himself from having to deal with more complex and fluid ideological categories. In other words, he only has to prove that his account of theism is better than his account of the

25. Ibid, 15:25-15:38.

26. Ibid, 39:23-40:04.

27. Focus On The Family, *True U: Does God Exist*, Lesson 1: “Faith and Reason”, 0.38-0.44.

28. Ibid, 19:06.

29. Ibid, Lesson 10, “The Moral Necessity of Theism, Part 2”.

other options. The real work is not so much in the scientific process itself as it is in the work of description. That is to say, the argument hinges not upon the evidence but on the descriptive accuracy of the presupposed categories of thought. The whole argument is actually dependent on his descriptive task. What is being persuaded is not theism, as such, but that our choices are limited between “worldviews.” This resource represents, at best, a somewhat superficial understanding of human thought, reason, and theism. And at worst, it is a reductionist and dismissive work of propaganda against more dynamic approaches to theistic philosophy, void of any careful or formal theological reflection.

This video curriculum is designed for high school students preparing for college and for young adults and college students. It is constructed from the same suspicions that come forth in “The Toughest Test in College”—suspicions about the motives of educators in higher education, and this is evidenced throughout the curriculum. If accepted uncritically, this resource will likely handicap adolescents from being able to engage the real and complex ideological ambiguities of both science and faith.

Simply Youth Ministry LIVE Curriculum

LIVE Curriculum is an evangelical youth ministry resource of yearly and topical curricula for both High School and Junior High small group programs. It was jointly written by Doug Fields, Kurt Johnston, Rick Lawrence, ym360, and Leader Treks. Science is virtually unengaged throughout the curriculum but they do have one lesson series on “Apologetics,” aimed primarily toward High School aged students. According to their website, “LIVE Apologetics will equip and encourage your students to clearly and effectively explain why they believe what they believe. And they’ll be prepared to respond to some of the worldviews they encounter, including atheism, agnosticism, Buddhism, and Islam.”³⁰

The idea in this resource is not to come alongside teenagers and help them sort things out on their own as much as it assumes a particular perspective and intends to impose it. As with the other apologetic resources, in LIVE, science is not constructive for theology. The implied assumption is that evolution is an alternative “worldview” to Christianity and is not intuitively compatible therewith. Science is addressed in passing in their section on atheism, with an implied compatibility between evolutionary theory and atheism.³¹ But they have an entire lesson dedicated to Evolution as a “worldview.”

The stated main objective of the section on evolution is to disprove evolution on scientific grounds. It states, “In this study, your students will examine the claims of evolution and consider some of the ways in which it falls short of scientific fact.”³² But as they proceed, the actual basis for their objections to evolution are specific biblical interpretations, not scientific interpretations. They admit that “far too many teenagers are ill-equipped to think critically about science,”³³ but they proceed to equip them not with tools to critically discern scientific materials but with biblical passages to trump evolutionary claims. In other words, science is discredited as a source when it seems to disagree with normative biblical data. Their method, as stated, is, “students will look at passages of Scripture that point to God as the divine architect and will discuss some ways the evolutionary theory falls short by using a few examples from nature.”³⁴ They approach science with a hermeneutic of suspicion with scripture as their normative source. Scripture is presupposed and science is employed wherever is harmonizes or proves the biblical data as they interpret it.

30. LIVE Curriculum, <http://live.simplyyouthministry.com/apologetics/>, accessed 2/23/14.

31. LIVE Curriculum, “Responding to Worldviews, Lesson 3: Atheism.”

32. Ibid, “Lesson 1: Evolution.”

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

Resources Which Promote Synthesis

Test of Faith (Youth Curriculum)

Test of Faith is a resource that seeks to promote a synthesis between faith and evolution. Intentionally, it does not attend solely to conclusions, but attends to the constructive process of reflection. According to their Youth Leaders Guide,

Good youth work practice insists that the leader is there to facilitate, not to impose answers but to empower, inspire and equip young people to reach their own conclusions. However, in order to achieve this releasing role, the leader needs to assume control, know something of where the group should go next, what issues will be met along the way, and how they can be overcome. To be good at empowering young people, youth leaders need to have travelled some way along the journey themselves. They need to be able to anticipate what is ahead, what obstacles might be encountered, and what resources could be used to overcome them.³⁵

Test of Faith, counters the apologetic approach which presupposes a conclusion prior to engaging scientific data. They criticize this, saying, "...Christians can leap blindly to a defence [sic] with arguments that are easily de-constructible, evidentially flawed and based on platform polemics."³⁶

A "Complementary" position is descriptive (though, as they say in their defense, they would not want to hold the position hard and fast) of the Test of Faith curriculum: "For the believer, science is just one of the ways we have of answering questions about the world, but our faith answers the most important questions."³⁷ Test of Faith is explicit about its sources and norms. While science is a true source in this type of resource, for Test of Faith revelation is the normative source. "What God has revealed about himself demands dramatic changes in our lives, and is unchanging. In contrast, scientific knowledge has very few demands on our lifestyle and core beliefs, and is a constantly changing body of knowledge."³⁸ This represents a fairly conservative theological perspective insofar as it assumes the immutability of God's self-revelation, but it nevertheless provides a more charitable (than its apologetic counterparts) approach to evolutionary theory. Test of Faith sees science and faith as apprehending the same reality from different perspectives. Like two blind people describing an elephant, science and faith describe the same world with need of each other to get the full picture. Test of Faith takes both accounts into consideration and, in some respects, presumes to stand on the outside watching with vision as science and faith grope to describe the same reality.

On The Spot

If one were to simply enter the word "science" in the search bar on the website of Group Publishing, only one specifically youth-ministry-oriented resource would be revealed.³⁹ *On The Spot: No-Prep Devotions for Youth Ministry* is a small, widely used, 24 page devotional resource for youth workers. Each devotional is reserved to one page and is designed to be implemented "on the spot," without preparation. The 18th devotional, entitled "Odd Couples: (Faith and Science)," is intended to create a space for conversation concerning faith's compatibility with science. The author recognizes a counterintuitive connection between faith and science, at least

35. Test of Faith, *Test of Faith: Youth Leaders Guide*, (http://www.testoffaith.com/youth/Test_of_FAITH_youth_leaders_guide.pdf, accessed 5/12/14), 5.

36. Ibid, 6.

37. Ibid, 7.

38. Ibid.

39. Group, <http://search.group.com/search?p=Q&w=Science+&image.x=0&image.y=0> Accessed 4/12/2014).

not as intuitive as the connection between “salt and pepper.” The implication is that science and faith are indeed compatible, even if we do not usually associate them with one another. However, the main point seems to be that faith is necessary to science, but not vice versa. It is implied that science needs faith, but it is not implied that faith needs science. Indeed, it is presupposed that “belief in a creative God” must precede scientific inquiry. As a one-page devotional, it is hardly designed to provide an exhaustive lesson on faith and science. But as a conversation starter, it begins with clearly implied presuppositions.⁴⁰

General Educational Resources which Promote Synthesis

BioLogos

“BioLogos presents evolution as God’s means of creation, so that the Church may celebrate and the world may see the harmony between science and biblical faith.”⁴¹ This internet resource provides videos, articles, and blog posts which look for a harmony in theological and scientific claims upon reality. “BioLogos provides virtual and actual meeting places where the best Christian minds in the sciences, theology, biblical studies, philosophy, and other fields meet on these topics of mutual interest for the good of the church.”⁴² They presuppose a logical and harmonious relationship between scientific and theological reflection... more than that, it is implied that good theology needs good science and vice versa. While some resources and curricula seek to provide reasoned arguments for an explicit presupposition, BioLogos’ perspective is more implicit. They provide more of a database of topical articles rather than a series of arguments built one upon the other. As such, they seem more interested in taking scientists’ perspectives seriously on their own terms without critically discrediting them.

BioLogos presupposes both scripture and the created world to be sources for the revelation of God. According to the second point on their “What We Believe” page, they write, “We believe that God also reveals himself in and through the natural world he created, which displays his glory, eternal power, and divine nature. Properly interpreted, Scripture and nature are complementary and faithful witnesses to their common Author.”⁴³ What exactly constitutes a “proper interpretation” of Scripture and nature is, however, left unspecified (and might be part of the very objective of their collection of resources). Both Scripture and Nature are seen as sources or “witnesses” but the theological question regarding norms is left unanswered. Which, if either, of these sources can be understood as normative is left unanswered as it is implied that both scripture and nature are equal voices in the same conversation.

It is assumed here that theological statements can be (and it is implied at times that they must be) supported by and consistent with scientific evidence. For example, they appeal to the scientific consistency of the theological claim that human beings are created in God’s image.⁴⁴

The applicability of most of the BioLogos materials to youth ministry settings is not necessarily intuitive. The resources are not all explicitly targeted at an adolescent audience. But this does not preclude the possibility that youth workers in various settings might be able to adapt the resources available here to a form to which adolescents might be receptive. BioLogos does offer links to resources that are specific to Youth Ministry, including *Discover Creation and*

40. Steve Parolini, ed. *On The Spot: No-Prep Devotionals for Youth Ministry* (Loveland: Group, 2008), 21.

41. Biologos, <http://biologos.org/about>, accessed 1.31.14.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid, <http://biologos.org/about>, accessed 1/31/2014.

44. Ibid, <http://biologos.org/questions/image-of-god>, accessed 5/12/2014.

Science (2006), *Fossils and Faith: Finding Our Way through the Creation Controversy* (2005), and *Test of Faith* (reviewed above).⁴⁵ Perhaps the most accessible contributions of BioLogos to youth ministry, accessible directly from their website, are their short videos.⁴⁶ Compiled from various resources including *From the Dust*—a feature-length documentary film from Highway Media and The BioLogos Foundation—these videos could be offered at the beginning of a small group gathering or larger gathering to initiate conversation or to serve as a break in a lecture or sermon concerning the various topics offered in these videos pertaining to science and theology.

If taught in such a way that they could retain the information, adolescents would learn from BioLogos that evolutionary theory as well as, more generally, contemporary scientific evaluation does not need to be received with hostility or immediate skepticism. Overall, they would learn to operate under the assumption that science and theology are compatible and can inform one another as equal partners in the same conversation. Again, this resource is still dominantly preoccupied with origins, but may provide a broader approach to science and faith than any of the previously reviewed resources, helping young people think critically and theologically about the relationship between science and faith.⁴⁷

Nazarenes Exploring Evolution

This project (and the book which it has produced) is the product of a unique and courageous denominational endeavor—courageous because of the pervasive conservatism in the Nazarene tradition—to articulate the possibility of taking evolution, the dominant scientific perspective on human origins, seriously without fear. Taking scripture, theology, and Christian tradition seriously, the contributors of this book seek to show the potential compatibility of evolution and creation, of Christian theology and serious science, and offer “Theistic Evolution or Evolutionary Creation to the denomination as a viable alternative among accounts of how God creates the Universe.”⁴⁸ As members of an evangelical denomination, the Nazarenes who are involving themselves in this exploration are prudent to tread lightly as their endeavor is controversial in their context. As such, the essays take a pastoral posture, indeed arguing for a kind of theistic evolution throughout, but not without creating space for disagreement and difference.

“...Most Nazarene scientists believe the evidence for evolution is strong and evolution does not necessarily conflict with the belief God is Creator,” writes Thomas Jay Oord, co-editor of *Nazarenes Exploring Evolution*.⁴⁹ And yet, “...more than half of white American Evangelicals believe humans and other living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time... many non-specialists in the Church of the Nazarene reject evolution.”⁵⁰ One of the goals of this project is to address the divide between the scholars and the laity of the Church of the

45. Ibid, <http://biologos.org/resources/small-groups#>, accessed 2/7/2014.

46. Ibid, <http://biologos.org/resources/multimedia>, accessed 2/7/2014.

47. Throughout the resources available on BioLogos, masculine language is applied to God (i.e. “him” and “his”). Aside from that, their faith statement seems to appeal to a more conservative (theologically speaking) host of Christians. This at least signals that the influence of contemporary feminist theology (as well as other contextual theologies) have not been fully appreciated by BioLogos. Their theological influences are mostly evangelical (as is evidenced in the traditional language of their faith statement and the theologians which are hosted on the site).

48. Sherri B. Walker and Thomas Jay Oord, ed. *Nazarenes Exploring Evolution* (Boise: SacraSage Press, 2014), 13-14.

49. Ibid, 15.

50. Ibid, 17.

Nazarene.⁵¹ This study, for Oord, is important for the Church's social witness, specifically to young people. Oord cites the Barna Group research in showing that "...young people leave the church and/or become atheists because they perceive the church to be opposed to science in general and evolution in specific."⁵² Like many of the apologetic resources, the concern is that without proper knowledge of science and faith, young people will leave their faith behind. Where this project differs, however, from Focus on the Family, for example, is that rather than being concerned to give fair arguments against evolution as an alternative "world view," *Nazarenes Exploring Evolution* is concerned in dismantling what they see as a "false dilemma" between science and faith.⁵³ It is notable that Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis has issued direct criticism to this project (and to BioLogos, which helped fund it) precisely for presenting creation and evolution as a false dilemma—referring to this as "blatant compromise..." which "God hates..."⁵⁴

Nazarenes Exploring Evolution, may be particular to the Nazarene context in many ways, but in the general concern for the potential compatibility of creation and evolution it represents a more general concern within American Evangelicalism at large. As such, this resource is not only relevant for Nazarenes but for any evangelicals struggling with a dilemma about creation and evolution.

This resource has not, to this point, developed any resources specific to contexts of youth ministry. But it may be helpful to youth workers who want to strengthen their own ability to respond to questions about human origins and biblical interpretation. A youth worker could potentially piece together a series of discussions based on the topics of each of the major themes of this book. Each chapter lends itself to discussion that could be made relevant to youth ministry contexts. Indeed, in a context in which evolution and creation presents a dilemma, Steven Smith's chapter, "Breaking Away From The False Dilemma," perhaps the most helpful essay in the book, could be offered to parents and older high school students and followed up with some discussion.

51. Ibid, 24.

52. Ibid, 26.

53. Steven Smith, "Breaking Away From a False Dilemma" in *Nazarenes Exploring Evolution*, 133-137.

54. Ken Ham, "Nazarenes Defending Evolution," Around the World with Ken Ham", <http://blogs.answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2013/06/22/nazarenes-defending-evolution/>, accessed 4/14/2014.

Conclusion

This resource review has sought to provide a review of a representative collection of youth ministry resources concerning science and faith. It has shown that the resources for the church's educational ministry to adolescents on this topic are dominantly preoccupied with human origins and empirical evidence for the existence of God. As such, these resources are polarizing—contributing to and not combatting the perception among young people that “Christians are too confident they know all the answers’ (35%). ‘...churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in’ (29%). ‘...Christianity is anti-science’ (25%)...” and (perhaps most significantly) that... “the creation-versus-evolution debate” is off-putting.⁵⁵ There is a need for resources which focus their energies less toward this narrow topic in the religion and science discussion and more toward deeper and more pressing issues of contemporary adolescence. I would suggest the possibility that the adolescents to whom the church is ministering have fundamentally different questions than the ones these resources are addressing. Resources that make apologetic arguments against evolution such as *Sword and Spirit* and *Answers in Genesis* are out of step with the needs of today's young people, because they presuppose their conclusion and thus hinder young people from actual theological and scientific discernment. Meanwhile resources which narrowly focus on defending evolution within a Christian theological framework, such as *BioLogos* and *Test of Faith*, are relatively few and still lack a broader, more contextually appropriate focus on the contemporary questions of adolescents concerning science and religion. We do not need another resource to “weigh in” on the debate between creation and evolution—either with synthesis or division. What is needed, rather, is a resource which attends to the process of thought and the existential questions more deeply associated with the contemporary context of adolescents.

55. The Barna Group, <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>, accessed 5/12/2014.

Appendix D—Endorsements

The “Science and Youth Ministry” project is groundbreaking, vitally necessary research that wrestles with nothing less than the church’s credibility, the viability of faith as a life-framework for young people, and the relevance of Christian tradition for a “secular age.” Unable to come up with a credible argument for faith amidst scientific authority structures, contemporary churches tend to retreat into either mute acceptance of scientific claims (on the one hand) or adopted laughable defensive postures on the other. Neither response is a compelling—or faithful—rendition of either Christian or scientific mindsets.

The “Science and Youth Ministry” represents an utterly new, unprecedented emphasis for youth ministry. It helpfully reframes the science/faith credibility dilemma as being about more than a tension between “science” and “faith” and, with Charles Taylor, points to a larger reality facing postmodern young people: a world that has “sloughed off transcendence.” By making youth ministry a place where young people unapologetically encounter the claims of science in the context of unflinching, transcendent faith, teenagers see the church as a place where humans wrestle with possibility—the possibilities of science, the possibility of God--in ways that help both science and faith move past mere functionality to claim their robustness as sources of meaning and hope.

- **Kenda Creasy Dean**

Mary D. Synnott Professor of Youth, Church and Culture, Princeton Theological Seminary

The findings of Templeton’s Science for Youth Ministry project point toward a need for reframing the science and faith conversation if we are to truly address issues at the heart of the matter for young people. This project lays the groundwork for constructively addressing issues of faith and science with teenagers beyond avoidance and fanaticism. It is with enthusiasm that I endorse the project’s initial findings. I’ll be working to ensure that these insights guide our own work at the Center for Youth Ministry Training.

- **Dr. Andrew Zirschky**

Academic Director at the Center for Youth Ministry Training &
Assistant Professor of Practical Theology and Youth Ministry at Memphis
Theological Seminary

Tony Jones and Andrew Root have moved the conversation beyond the well-worn tired paths of hyperbole with their initial study, *Youth Ministry & Science*. My hope is that their continued mix of quantitative and qualitative research will guide congregational youth ministry on a helpful new path towards thoughtful engagement of American Christian teenagers and the physical sciences.

- **Adam McLane**

Partner, The Youth Cartel