

#### Faith Generation:

When being church succeeds for young people

Faith Generation: engaging young people & growing the church

Hanging by a thread: the problem of holding faith in a Secular Age

Holding out hope: Practices to help hang onto faith in a Secular Age



Hanging by a thread: the problem of holding faith in a Secular Age

...at school, I kind of put on like a safety catch... 'cos you're on guard, [as a Christian] in a way, at school.



... if I didn't come here [to No.1], I think I would have lost my faith...because there is no one in my family that is Christian.

Nicky

In Britain institutional religion now has a half-life of one generation, to borrow the terminology of radioactive decay. The generation now in middle age has produced children who are only half as like as they are to attend church, to identify themselves as belonging to a denomination, or to say that belief is important to them

David Voas (Praxeis 2014 p.1)



Christians have seen the most substantial net losses in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden...There is a difference of 28% between the share of Norwegians who were raised Christian (79%) and the share who are currently Christian (51%)...The overwhelming majority of those who have left Christianity *identify as unaffiliated.* 

Being Christian in Western Europe (Pew Research Centre, 2018 p.83-4)



### What's going on?

- Declining attendance & affiliation are markers of 'secularization'
  - A Secular Age: post
    Christian & post secular
- The pressure on holding faith in our secular age is not consistent over a life course
  - Faith decline is proximal & progressive



#### The ground for faith generation

implausibility Personal choice Implausible choice Choice Immanent frame Sense No sense of transcendence Sense of scrutiny

Formative Spirituality Nothing works for me Moral Therapeutic Dualism Holding out hope: hanging onto faith in a secular age



The impression of Impact is that it provides a home for young people within the church community. It has a distinct identity evidenced by enthusiasm to join and the way in which the group is talked about. It has it's own meeting space. However, it also has a visible presence within the wider church community... especially since it has now colonized the balcony...

No. 1 is based in a converted terraced house. It feels more like the local café or local pub! Conversation flows around local issues: supporting the football club talking about mutual friends etc. No.1 does not have a program of meetings, it's a relationship based drop in, but the young people who come talk about as that 'Christian place'



Youth ministry: making church 'attractive' or making faith 'real'

#### Participation in youth ministry & mission

Enculturation Formal & Informal Learning Socialization **Distinct Learning** 

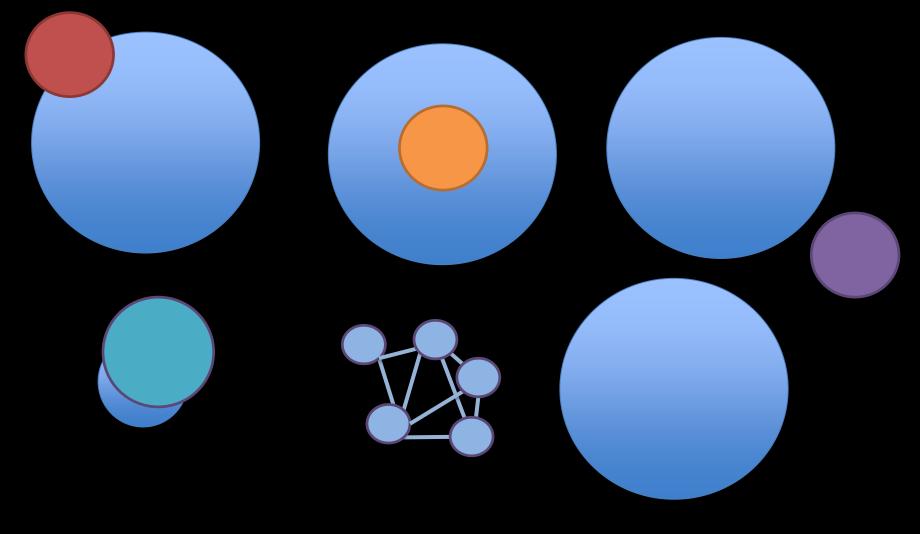
Mediation Historic faith bearing practices Theological reflection on practice

Intentional relationships

Transformational Practices

Inculturation Relational Presence Youth culture & worship

#### One eared Mickey Mouse, fried egg, blob off, Pacman's ghost, webbed wonder, perfect circle

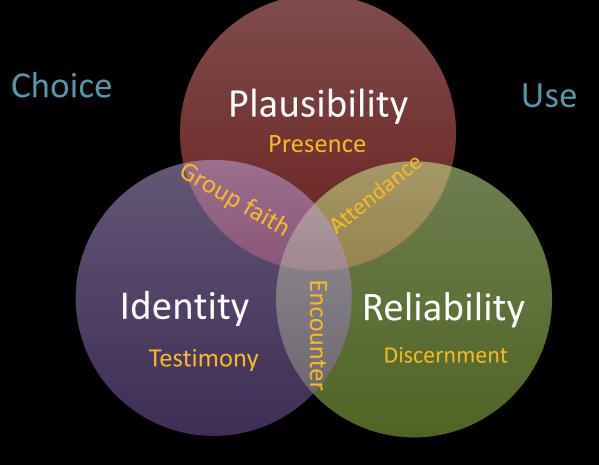


### Faith habitus: formation as gift and work

Faith formation for young people in a secular age is a process of indwelling and constructing, of coming to terms with the faith identity they were raised in, or adopting a faith identity that helps make sense of who they are. It is a process that requires us to connect to a community that understands this task and has experience of this.

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#### The Practice of Faith Generation



Sense



#### Faith Generation:

Where does the church need to succeed?

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When the community of faith begins to recognise that new challenges and conditions call for new patterns of response and praxis, a process of intentional practical theological engagement can be the result.

James Fowler ('The emerging shape of Practical Theology' 199 p.83)

#### Faith as indwelling & construction

[Understanding of God and self] gains substance by its coming into being in concrete, embodied, purposeful practices [through such practices] we are both the tellers and the told of our identity such that....Faith is indwelt and constructed: habitus as handed down and re-interpreted anew for every generation

Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice* 1996, p 95,114

#### Faith forming communities

Developing Christians...is not primarily a cognitive endeavour...but for hundreds of years the church has treated it as such. The act of becoming a Christian is the actual practice of being a Christian, over and over again. One does not become a Christian by sitting in a room in a church hearing a bible story...one becomes a Christian by being immersed in God's story everywhere it is told, living with Gods people, and repeating the symbolic acts of the church, as well as repeating the acts of loving neighbour and denying oneself, over and over again. [Such] education...cannot be regulated to a few hours a week spent learning inside the walls of a church. Ivy Beckwith Formational Children's Ministry p19

#### Youth ministry: making real faith

Youth ministry exists to enable young people to indwell and construct Christian identity through participation in intentional Christian community

#### THE PRACTICE OF FAITH GENERATION

plausibility: identity: reliability

Choice: making faith personal brought up to believe I think it's more about being comfortable . . . being comfortable wearing those clothes, like - instead of wearing it, sort of, ashamed, like, in your room, like, taking it off before you go you just don't care, and you go out wearing it, like . . . confidence in . . . what beliefs you hold . . . being comfortable with how people view you. Gerard, Impact

#### Choice: making faith personal brought in to belief

I believe in God because he has helped me out big time and he has never left me and has never let me down. I became a Christian because my life was crap, I had to put up with a lot of things. I couldn't cope with that, my mum and dad breaking up and my sister going into prison . . . and I wanted the pain to go away. Sarah, No.1

## Continual choice: managing personal faith

If I didn't go here [No. 1], I think I would have lost my faith a bit, and because, like, there's no one in my family that is Christian. My mum, she's not Christian, but she believes there's a God, and, yet, sometimes, I kind of like say, 'But why does this happen? Why does this happen?' I don't know. But, if I hadn't come here, they would have been saying these things, and I would have thought, 'Hmm, that's true, so I won't believe in that.' Nicky, No.1

Continual choice: managing personal faith You're completely different around school friends, because I get into that school mode where I'm one of the only people who's actually a Christian and flaunts it and says, 'I'm a Christian, I don't really care.'... When I get into weekends, there are other people around me who are Christians and I don't have that safety 'on' any more. Because, at school, I kind of put on like a safety catch. .. 'cos you're put into a mode where you are on guard, in a way, at school. Gerard, Impact

A place to be Christian: making plausible choices

[Impact has] always been useful for me, when I've had problems or doubts and things, because *it's sort of become a ritual in my life*, with every Sunday, coming here, so it's always helped me when I've had doubts and stuff.

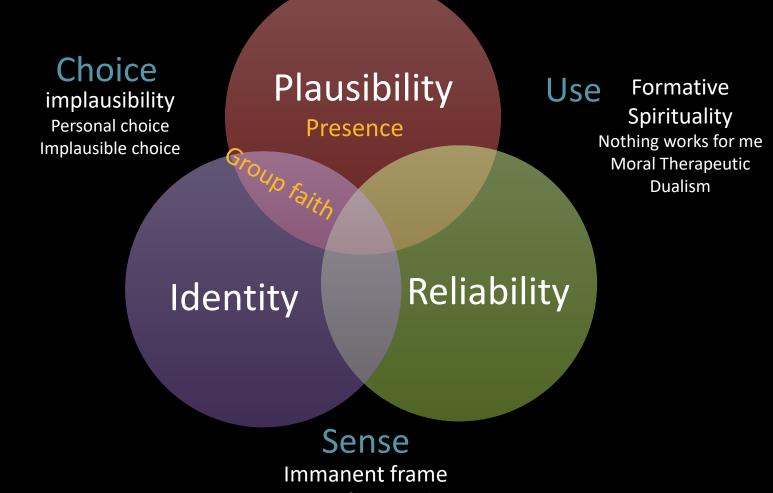
Phillip, Impact



#### A Christian place to be Christian: making choice plausible

Well, it sort of brought the three of us together as friends, by that person. But, it just sort of made me realize, you know, God can throw together a place like this and, I didn't see it then, but the change I've seen in a few people, you know, if he can do that, then he must be real. Ellen, No1

#### The Practice of Faith Generation



No sense of transcendence Sense of scrutiny Sense: believing through experience

I can remember singing during the worship one night and this overwhelming feeling of happiness and comfort came over me. It's like a tingling feeling and I could just tell that it was the Holy Spirit. It was at the point that I fully realized the awesomeness of God, and for me it was the proof of his existence that I had always craved. Natalie, Impact



Sense: the experience of believing [Pete] was saying a lot of stuff about 'Help Nicky and, like, help him with this Wicca stuff and help him to get rid of all this baggage he's got.' And, seriously, I closed my eyes and I could just feel his hand, this warm hand coming down and taking all this baggage off me. It was so amazing. Nicky, No1 Seeking sense: places to find answers and raise questions

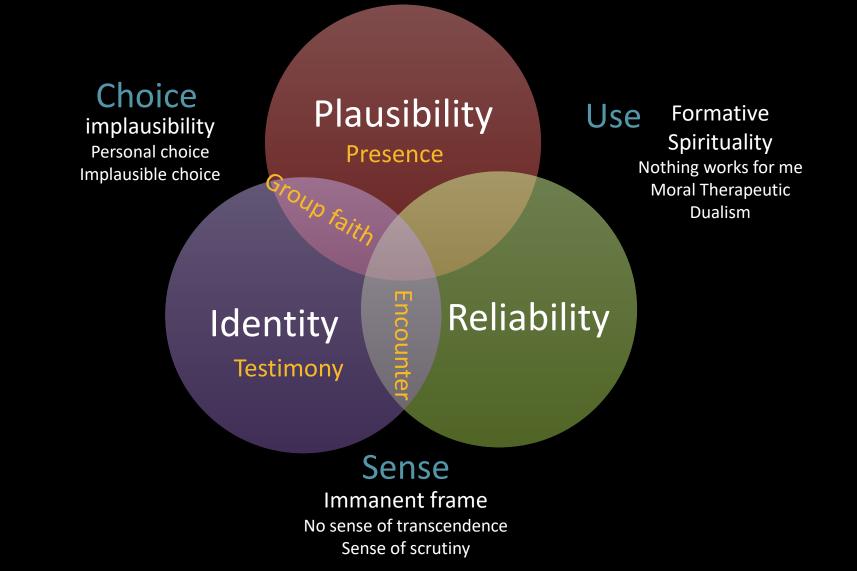
It's for young people, it's not for everyone, it's not for adults down to babies, which the church is. It's pitching it so that adults can get something from it, whereas if they're pitching it at the ten-year-old level, then the adults are just going to be like, 'Oh, I know that already, that means nothing to me.' Whereas Impact is something that is specifically targeted at our age range. Marcus, Impact

#### Sense making: places to raise questions and find answers

We did this sleepover in a church thingy . . . I was kind of p - - - d off and I kind of went somewhere to think, and as I came out, Martin was there, and I kind of discussed why I was angry, upset, p - - -– d off, and he just sat there and described that God could change everything. Mark, No.1



#### The Practice of Faith Generation



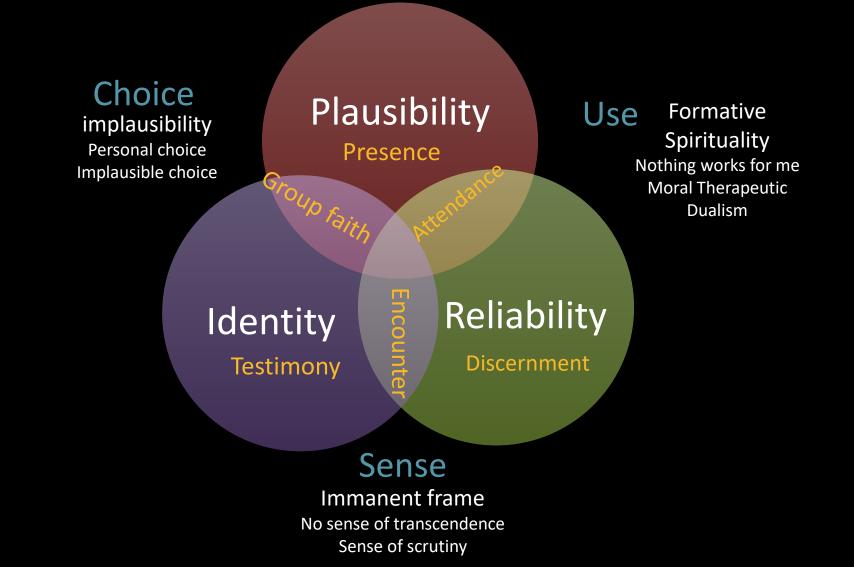


#### Working at faith: useful participation

Impact is also a key part to my faith. I find it really helps when keeping me in touch with God, and being able to share your worries, hopes and experiences with others is incredibly important to me. *Natalie*  Letting faith work: reliable lifestyle

And like when I asked Martin if I could be a volunteer leader, and he said yeah. Normally, I wouldn't stand up to people, but if I have to, like, if people are messing around, and because I have had to, I think it's built my confidence up. Ellen, No.1

#### The Practice of Faith Generation



# The practice of faith generation

- Indwelling and construction
  - Rebuilding an ecology of faith
  - Constructing and indwelling Christian identity in community
- Practicing faith generation
  - Plausibly: presence & groupfaith
  - Identity: testimony & encounter
  - Reliability: discernment & attendance



Reversing the decline in the number of young people in the Church requires faith generation. Being intentional about this activity requires attention to how we form places and groups within which young people can find the plausibility, identity and reliability practices to shape faith for the secular age in which they live Faith Generation p.172

