Foundations and Models of Islamic Youth Work
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Abstract
This paper explores the Qur’anic, philosophical, and socio/cultural foundations of Muslim youth work, as well as Muslim youth work praxis. Youth ministry done by Muslims for Muslims is increasingly common in the UK/EU, Canada, and the US as now, depending on the country or region, up to 30% of Mosques have active youth programs. This research rests on three categories of source material: 1) an examination of key published and unpublished source documents, 2) a comprehensive review of international and country specific Muslim websites, and 3) extensive personal interviews with key Muslim youth work trainers in the UK, Canada, and the US. This session concludes with a discussion of the positive challenges for Christian youth ministry in the presence of a robust Muslim youth work presence.

Introduction

“When I told my family I didn’t want to be a doctor, but a youth worker instead, they were confused and disappointed.”

(Muslim youth work leader, a Syrian doing youth ministry full time in Toronto, Canada)

Though Islam has been a global religion since the middle ages, it has come to the forefront of national attention in the western world through highly visible negative events. Though each of these events cast the Islam as a religion in a less than positive light, thinking people understand that Islam is not a unified whole bent on jihad. Rather, Islam is a religion that comes in many versions, similar to Christianity and Judaism bifurcated by history, theology, ethnicity and culture.

Scholars have shed light on the various contours of Islam in many ways, especially juxtaposed with other religious faiths. Examples include Carabain and Bekkers in 2012 comparing philanthropic behavior of Christians, Muslims, and Hindus in the Netherlands, the 2011 examination of interfaith contact in America, or the intersections of Christianity and Islam in Britain by Bell and Chapman.
It should come as no surprise that Muslim parents care about their own children, and that the religious faith of those children is a parental concern, particularly for families who emigrate from a majority Muslim nation to a Western nation where the Muslim population is a tiny percentage of the whole. It is also no surprise that some Muslim leaders in Western countries should become concerned that there may be a weakening of the faith (if not outright faith abandonment) among children and youth born to first generation immigrant Muslim parents, now raising their children a culture awash with mores and morals completely foreign to traditional Islam.

This paper explores an important outgrowth of this parental and Muslim leader concern for their own young people: Muslim Youth Work. Here we will explore the Qur’anic, philosophical, and socio/cultural foundations of Muslim youth work, as well as Muslim youth work praxis.

**Theoretical and Research Antecedents**

**Sub-Culture Identity Theory**

Sub-Culture Identity Theory, as a subfield within sociology of religion, provides a conceptual home for the consideration of Muslim youth work. In this theoretical framework there is vocabulary to articulate the processes by which religions and religious groups can maintain (and grow) within modern, pluralistic societies. This maintenance and/or growth can occur by creating a subculture which affirms, according to Christian Smith, collective identities that provide adherents with meaning and belonging.4 He goes on to explain “In a pluralistic society, religious groups which are better at transmitting and employing the cultural tools needed to create both clear distinction from, and significant engagement and tension with other relevant outgroups, will be relatively successful.”5 We will see some of these “cultural tools” when Muslim youth work praxis is considered.

Sub-cultural identity theory is rather new in the field, and was given impetus first in the US through the study of religious denominations, and particularly those labeled “evangelical.” Sub culture identity theory forms the backdrop of studies regarding Muslim youth as well. For example, young people in Germany of Turkish descent whose parents are essentially secular, are flocking to a “pop” version of Islam in which the (re)discovery of Islam is seen as “young, chic, and cool.”6

**Attachment Theory**

Another conceptual home for the consideration of Muslim youth work stems from attachment theory. Here the strength of personal bonds and connections are seen as not only important for emotional health and flourishing, but attachment (with parents, with significant other adults, and like minded peers) also has a part in the transmission of culture (including religion) from one generation to the next.7 Academic studies of attachment
and religion abound as well as specific studies which demonstrate a causal connection between attachment and youth religiosity. Furthermore, researchers are beginning to explore attachment theory and Muslim youth religiosity. For example, a study of 1,861 youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent living in the Netherlands showed a weakening of religious identity within the second generation. Another study posits that attachment has a great deal to do with religious conversion. This is very relevant not only for the relationship to the Muslim youth leader to individual youth, but the relationship of Muslim youth and Muslim youth worker to non-Muslims as various dawa (outreach/evangelism) programs become part of the youth group’s schedule.

We will see examples of attachment theory operationalized (latently if not explicitly) by Muslim youth workers in both North America and Europe when we consider Muslim youth work praxis.

Youth Religiosity Research

The significant connection of youth religiosity and prosocial behavior is, after hundreds and hundreds of studies across the globe, incontrovertibly established in the social sciences. While religious youth work (no matter what the religion) may be good work for theological and missional reasons, social scientists are interested in youth religiosity from the standpoint of a civil society. Higher youth religiosity, compared to less religious peers, means (among many other things) better emotional and physical health, improved relationships with parents, better academic performance, clearer sense of purpose, and a greater willingness to give time and money to help others. High religiosity also means less alcohol and drug use, less sexual activity, and less criminality.

While initial youth religiosity research primarily focused on the Christian faith, it is no surprise that Muslim youth religiosity research is beginning to appear, either in comparison with other religions or with Muslim youth as the sole research focus. A representative comparative-religion study is the work of David Dollahite who explored the likelihood of Christian and Muslim youth in the US to forgo risky (and sinful) behaviors for the sake of a higher good and higher benefit. By contrast, Muslim young people were the sole focus of religiosity and personality development by Mark Grey.

In so far as a common component of youth religiosity research is participation in a religious youth group, the study of Muslim youth groups and Muslim youth work is both relevant and contributory.

Data and Methods

Personal Interviews
After reviewing Muslim and Muslim youth work websites in both North America and the UK, I sought to interview key Muslim youth work trainers. Some websites did not have updated contact information. Other Muslim leaders or their organizational office personnel did not answer emails or phone calls. However, I was able to have long phone conversations with Muslim youth work leaders from Vancouver, British Columbia, Toronto, Ontario, and Chicago, Illinois. On a sabbatical trip to the UK in February 2012, I was able to have face to face interviews with key Muslim youth leaders who comprise, in my opinion, the brain-trust of Muslim youth work. The three resided in Oxford, Bradford, and Nottingham.

While on the one hand it was no small task to find and gain access to these six leaders, succinctly convey the macro and micro purpose of my research, and seek to gain trust/credibility in the crucial first 60 seconds of live-time contact, on the other hand once “in” the conversations held once were lengthy and rich in two-way discovery. I came away from the experience with a deep respect for the heart these men had for young people and the work of youth ministry.

Source Documents

Especially in the UK there are rich resources for the scholarly consideration of foundational understandings upon which Muslim youth work rests. Additionally, there are resources which discuss youth work and the merits or appropriateness of various youth work models. These resources will be discussed and cited subsequently in this paper.

Web Research

I stumbled across, as is sometimes the case in web searching, a fascinating and comprehensive site. Salatomatic.com touts itself as the “World’s most comprehensive guide to mosques and Islamic schools.” Of interest here, though tangential to research focus of this paper, is that site sight allows persons to write reviews of individual mosques and rate them on a scale of one to five, a bit like TripAdvisor.com or Hotels.com. In some cases one can know from these reviews the proximity of public transportation for example, or if the restrooms are clean (!).

There are mosque related news stories on Salatomatic.com as well. For example, the June 21, 2012 home page featured stories which included the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, Tennessee USA (rated 5.0 by reviewers) touting their tornado and flood relief efforts locally, and their ongoing Haiti relief work. A Turkish mosque is also featured, and their new building program. When construction is finished, women will be able to pray at the same time as men. (As is normal in Islam, men and women gather separately. Now, in this mosque, this separate gathering will happen
simultaneously.) There is a featured story of a Mosque “going green” in Abu Dhabi. And did you know the first underwater mosque is under construction in Saudi Arabia?

Of direct interest to the study of Muslim youth work is the searchable feature of the website. For every continent on the globe one can search by country, by region/state/province, and by city. Information includes a list of Mosques and their “denomination” (e.g. Shia, Sunni or Sufi). Information on each mosque is as comprehensive as possible. If there is any kind of youth group, school, or “Sunday school” it is listed under “Services Offered”. If this youth group has a website the url given. This makes possible, then, the collection of quantitative data. From January 2011-April 2012 two key Nyack College students and I examined the salromatic.com information on over 3000 mosques. Among those 3000, if a youth group website was given, we studied it as well.

The Big Picture of Muslim Youth Work

Mosque Based

How prevalent is mosque based youth work in the countries studied here?

Table 1: Mosques and Mosque Based Youth Work in Selected Countries, 2011-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Mosques</th>
<th>Youth Groups (number and percent)</th>
<th>Main province/state/region</th>
<th>Number and percent in this area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>80 (23%)</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>208 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>350 (18%)</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>302 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1131</td>
<td>328 (29%)*</td>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humber*</td>
<td>239 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6(18%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2(50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6(50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This count of youth groups does not include the 302 mosques in London, which were not studied.

We will look again at mosque based youth work when Muslim youth work praxis is considered.

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While majority of mosques do not (yet) have their own youth groups, there exists in the US, Canada, and the UK regionally based youth ministry that seeks to provide youth work infrastructure. These would be especially helpful for smaller mosques which do not have the personnel, vision, or resources to provide their own youth programming.

Regionally Based

Regionally based Muslim youth work takes on a variety of forms. In Houston, Texas, for example, is the Straight Path “iBelong” Initiative. While the genesis of the concept originated with the Muslim American Society this regionalized program has an impressive list of objectives and a variety of programs to move these objectives forward. These objectives are:

- assist Muslim youth in their bicultural competence, i.e. effective communication between several cultural identities
- assist in the full integration in society while maintaining their Muslim identity
- contribution of youth to education of the general public regarding Islam
- to provide parent and child classes that help strengthen family relationships
- positive peer relationships and peer-pressure resistance
- increase self-concept and self-esteem
- increase leadership, teamwork, management and cognitive development
- to build reading, writing, mathematics, speaking and thinking skills through academic programs
- to increase a sense of belonging, connected engagement in the Muslim community and the society at large
- to increase the perceived influence of Muslim youth on issues in the community that affect their lives

Another example of regional Muslim youth work is the Muslim Youth Camp of California organization. Held annually since 1962, MYC offers a one week premier camping experience. Their mission statement gives the heart of the organization’s purpose:

The Muslim Youth Camp brings Muslim families and individuals of diverse backgrounds together for a fun-filled week of Islamic living, learning and inspirational experiences in nature. By encouraging camaraderie, personal spiritual exploration and respect for diversity of Islamic practice, MYC seeks to be a strong catalyst in the creation of American Muslim identities.

A typical day at MYC involves daily prayers, swimming and group sports, teamwork competition, classes, campfire and free time. Their marketing materials indicate they not only draw from the state of California, but nationally and internationally.

Regional Muslim youth work organizations often provide the leadership training infrastructure to support Muslim youth work in other regions or in local mosques. The youth department of the British Columbia,
Canada Muslim Association has a full-time paid director whose office and volunteers offer multiple services:

* Formulate guidelines and policies for youth group at each Branch or Chapter for common good

* Develop a program of events and activities with focus on Islamic values and leadership training

* Conduct Yearly Muslim Youth Conventions

* Sports and recreation services to promote sports activities.  

As in Canada and the US there are multiple Muslim youth work organizations in the UK which are local (but not Mosque based) and have a regional draw. They function akin to parachurch organizations so common in Christianity. One of the most developed of these analogous-to-parachurch organizations is Muslim Youth Skills headquartered in Bradford. They offer youth work training courses. The current list of courses offered includes:

Engaging Young People

Understanding Culture

Islam and Muslims

Introduction to Muslim Youth Work

Tackling Crime

Additionally Muslim Youth Skills offer on-site consultation by their trained leaders as well as personal counseling and youth work related problem solving. They position themselves as offering “first class service to the public, private, and third sector,” and “Muslim Youth Skills draws upon over a decade of experience in the youth and community work field. Our trainers and consultants come from various professions, thus enriching the services that we offer. Although our services combine an understanding of religious, cultural and spiritual needs of Muslims specifically, our service is not exclusive to this community. Many of our programmes and workshops respond to wider social issues.”

As we have seen Muslim youth work exists at the local and regional level. There are many national-level organizations facilitating Muslim youth work as well.

Nationally Based
The Muslim Association of Canadian Youth is a department within the Muslim Association of Canada and exists to provide activities that are “sustainable, professional, and national.” Their mission statement is to the point: 1) To develop committed Muslim youth capable of spreading and giving root to the comprehensive understanding of Islam, and to prepare them to be at the forefront in the development of their communities, and 2) to elevate the general level of commitment, awareness and education of Muslim youth so they are better able to meet the challenges of the future as Canadian Muslims. They also publish a monthly magazine, MY Voice:

In the USA a representative example (of several possibilities) is Muslim Youth of North America: “Connect, Inspire, Belong” A national gathering related to Ramadan was held in July 2012. Other activities include an annual convention, summer camps, and resources for Muslim parents.

In the US there are beginning to appear books written for young people to affirm and support their Muslim religious faith. The subculture-identity theorists would understand the publication of magazines and books as all contributory toward the creation of an understandable and acceptable (to Muslim youth) framework to see themselves in their religion.
The UK is rich with organisations seeking to service the needs of British Muslim young people. These include Young Muslims UK (ymuk.net), and Muslim Youth Skills (muslimyouthskills.co.uk). One of most developed organizations is the Muslim Youthwork Foundations

The mission of the Muslim Youth Work Foundation is “Creating safe spaces for Muslim young people to explore personal, social, spiritual, and political choices.” Their website offers (among many other choices) a poets corner, mentoring opportunities, Muslim youth related art, and a create-your-own video feature called Witness. The MYWF has a subsidiary website Muslimyouth.net which is “…the coolest online space for Muslim youth!”
Qur’anic, Hadithic, and Cultural Foundations

Christian youth ministry thinkers, as well as practitioners prone to reflection, seek to anchor what they do in the Bible, theology and cultural theory. Recent works by Kenda Dean and Andrew Root, Pete Ward, as well as Tony Jones are representative examples.24 Similarly, there is beginning to emerge out of Muslim youth workers a sense of reflection. When asked for a basis of Muslim youth work in the Qur’an itself many Muslim youth leaders will, without hesitation, speak of Chapter 18, The Cave. Here we see the Prophet taking seriously the spirituality and spiritual potential of young men:

“[Prophet], We shall tell you their story as it really was. They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We gave them more guidance. We gave strength to their hearts when they stood up and said, ‘Our Lord is the Lord of heavens and earth. We shall never call upon any god other than Him…’” (18:13, 14). In the verses surrounding this text we see that the belief of these young men was considered a sign by the [Prophet]. In this chapter see also see them as capable of not only belief, but of following the way and being divinely guided.

In Islamic culture, puberty is the mark of entry to accountability and responsibility in life. The Arabic word is “taklif,” legal obligation. It is incumbent upon Muslim parents (and now youth workers as well) to help young people “get it” that is, to believe and behave in such a way as to reflect they are in the Deen, the Way. Verses in the Qur’an such as 41:44 “…a guide and a healing to those who believe…” applies to not just adults, but young people as well.25 Similarly, exhortations to justice (4:35) and to be a receiver and giver of mercy (1:1) apply to all Muslims who are of age.

Yet another foundation of Muslim youth work comes out of the Arabic language and culture, the concept of “Ilm” which simply mean, “knowledge” or “knowledge of.”26 Allah is seen as the source of truth and knowledge, and it is the responsibility of all Muslims to know and follow this truth. Those who do not yet know this truth, must be taught it by those who do. Whatever the sphere of Muslim youth work, be it local, regional, or national, there is tremendous emphasis in Islam to teach this knowledge, or to teach those who will teach. Teaching, in many mosques, is everything.

While the concept of ilm has to do with what the individual knows, the concept of ummah has to do in many respects to do with what the individual feels. And what is the Muslim to feel? They are to feel connected to other Muslims around the globe in a sense of unity in their faith.27 There has been much discussion in the Muslim community as to what ummah actual means with Muslims living not only in “Muslim” nations, but scattered abroad.28 Nevertheless, the concept of ummah provides a conceptual foundation for the websites, events, and gatherings of Muslim young people locally,
regionally, and nationally and those who provide this youth-religiosity infrastructure. Muslim youth work helps youth feel connected to a larger whole.

There are multiple tensions within Muslim youth work as to what exactly constitutes acceptable youth ministry practice. These tensions usually relate to cultural practice and tradition. For example, I asked all six of the Muslim youth worker leaders I interviewed about the use of music in youth work. All of them stated that music must glorify Allah, and that is theoretically possible, but they would never use music in a youth gathering at any level...mosque, region, or national gathering. It would be too controversial. There is a concern for helping, preserving, and conserving the good character of Muslim young people as they try to maneuver their lives within a culture awash in non-Muslim values. One Muslim youth worker, citing 68:4 of the Qur’an “…indeed, your character is of a vast ethos…” the youthworker stated, “I have (a concern) of many current models, which appear to be based on and regulated by the norms of consumer society…”

Based on the Qur’an (the revelation given to Muhammed) and the hadith, (the reported sayings and activities of Muhammed not contained in the Qur’an) one can conceptualize a three fold purpose of Islam for all Muslims, including young ones who have attained taklif, as:

1) Attain faith
2) Do good works.
3) Be one who is God conscious or God fearing.

How does Muslim youth work seek to do this?

Models of Muslim Youth Work Praxis

Non-Confessional Models

Especially in the UK, much of Muslim youth work is essentially secular. This is youth work done by men and women (who happen to be Muslims) who desire to help young people who are economically hurting, feeling disenfranchised by the larger culture, and are seen as “at risk.” With 33% of Britain’s’ Muslim population under the age 17, and 71% under the age of 31, social scientists and civil authorities were becoming alarmed that many of these young people live in impoverished swaths of city real estate, which breed despair, crime, and make youth ripe for radicalization. Scholarly interest in this subpopulation of the UK has been robust, and the future of these disenfranchised youth has been a concern even prior to the events of 7/7.
In “community youth work” youth workers engage young people in recreation and positive interaction. In the UK there are nearly 4000 full time employed community youth workers, and it is no surprise that some of those who feel inclined to youth-oriented social work would be themselves Muslim.

One on one or small group discussions may take place on issues such as citizenship, bullying, discrimination, sexuality, drug abuse and identity. These topics are relevant to all young people, and in many communities, such as the Tower Heights area of London, virtually all the youth are from Muslim families. Additionally, this non-confessional youth work may include sports programs like football, basketball, ping pong, and the like.

A very creative approach targeting the personal needs of Muslim young people is the Muslim Help Line. Established in 2001, the MHL is lead by trained mental health professionals who then train the volunteers which receive the phone calls. MHL is functional 6pm-Midnight Monday-Friday and Noon-Midnight on Saturdays and Sundays. Additionally they offer live chat space on line, and email inquiries 24/7.

The MYHL is an example of Muslim youth work that is largely secular, but does certainly offer to help young people discuss what it means to be Muslim in a country such as the UK.

Another way to understand UK secular Muslim youth work is that it is a deficit perspective. That is, the focus is on the felt needs, the problems and issues faced in the daily life of these young people. These needs might be emotional, safety, or a need for simple hope to function in a culture (and country) where they may feel misunderstood or not welcome.
In North America various Mosques and Islamic Centers offer a variety of programs quite parallel to secular youth organizations, but the *deficit* perspective is virtually non-existent. The flavor of non-confessional Muslim youth work in North America seems more focused on *enrichment*, not deficit. For example, Muslim Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts are widespread in North America and the website of the Michigan Muslim Scouts today reports that the camping trip of Troop 1139 was a resounding success.\(^3\) Especially Scouts engage, train, and empower parents as Troop Leaders, so the effort becomes a whole-family activity (though sex-segregated).

In Calgary, Alberta, Canada is an example a Muslim equivalent to Big Brothers Big Sisters. The Muslim Family Network of Calgary explains its program in the words:

*The Big Sister/Big Brother program has been developed so that children can experience the richness, excitement, and warmth of an Islamic environment, a place where children learn the importance of caring, sharing, tolerance, patience, and working with others.*

*In addition to arts and crafts, recreational and outdoor activities (including field trips), the program will offer Islamic activities based on weekly themes.*

*The classes also provide the opportunity for university and high school students to gain important skills while they serve as assistants and volunteers for the program.*

*Each week of the program will include activities and learning based on a theme.*\(^3\)

While not strictly secular, Muslim Boys Clubs and Muslim Girls Clubs function similarly to their non-sectarian counterparts. For example, in Surrey, British Columbia, the Muslim Youth Centre Boys Club is for boys ages 10-15 and offers floor hockey (a Canadian favorite if ice isn’t handy!) good food, and the opportunity to “build your Muslim character.”\(^4\)

**Confessional Models**

At the other end of the scale of Muslim Youth Work models we find those that are explicitly religious in nature. These would encompass most of Mosque based youth work as well as much of the work of regional and national Muslim youth organization. While many of these organizations are holistic in that they do not ignore the topics germane to young people of any religion (or no religion at all) but the purpose is also to help youth become better Muslims and also to “outreach” to their non-Muslim friends. Here we are talking about the nearly 800 Mosque based youth groups highlighted in Table 1. Non unlike Christian youth groups, the “program mix” varies from Mosque to Mosque. While virtually all mosque based youth groups offer *teaching* of some kind, other normal components include *sports/recreation, leadership development, and service opportunities.* Here is a sample of specific Mosques and how they operationalize one or more of these four components.
**Teaching**

This could be, in a very conservative Mosque, the memorization of key Qur’an passages, or more wide ranging discussions of the life-application implications of Islamic teaching, very akin to Bible studies in Christian youth groups. The Mosque at 1 Beech Road in Luton, UK offers regular Qur’an classes for boys and girls. The Mosque in Alexandria, Virginia just outside of Washington DC offers a regular “Pizza and Prophets” night…good food and good study/discussion of the Qur’an or Hadith. The youth group at a mega-mosque in the Los Angeles area offers a 90 minute Sunday School class which includes an hour long lecture followed by discussion. The High School group of the mega-mosque Waterloo Mosque outside of Toronto has very active youth program which includes small groups for the processing of the teaching that occurs. Called “knowledge circles” these help young people feel part of “Generation M”

The Morden Islamic Center in Surrey UK calls their youth program “Friday Circles.” A typical Friday program involves a brief time of teaching (called “Islaic Reminders), but then quiz competition, puzzles and projects capped off by food.

**Sports and Recreation**

Mosque and regionally based Muslim youth work involves *sports and recreation.* The Islamic Society of Greater Lansing (Michigan) includes a Spring Break Challenge which includes basketball, soccer, and football.
Similarly, the Young Muslims of the Teaneck, New Jersey Mosques offers a 3:3 basketball tournament for ages 12-15 and 16-19. The Mosque at Wylerstrasse 115, Bern, Switzerland, offers a series of two-day Summer day-camp programs for children and youth. Recreation and sports are the main ingredients but there is certainly a Muslim ethos as well as together-times whose purpose is to inspire and support these young people spiritually. In Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada the sports program (basketball and volleyball) takes place (for boys only) on Wednesday and Saturday nights. The London (Ontario) Muslim Mosque offers drop-in basketball for boys at their gym on Friday nights and Karate classes on Saturday nights. The Aisha Mosque in Birmingham, UK has sport night every Saturday night for their youth program called “UKIM Youth.’

**Leadership Training**

Having young people themselves in leadership or training to be leaders is a recurrent theme within Muslim confessional youth work. For example, the Yaseen Foundation in the San Francisco Bay Area has a youth club which is age (but not sex) divided: 13-14, 15-18. This program is lead by an elected group of young people, under the advisement of former members who are in their early 20’s. Similarly, the Husaini Youth Group in Peterborough (UK) has a large number of young people themselves on their leadership committee, not only making decisions about aspects of the youth program, but leading them as well. The Taric Islamic Centre in Toronto seeks to develop leadership in young people by their participation the Taric Youth Committee, which will teach them leadership and teamwork skills.

**Service Projects**

Not unlike Christian youth groups, the King Fahd Mosque of Culver City, California has a youth group that goes monthly to visit at the local hospital and senior citizens center. This mosque has significant resources devoted to youth work, with a youth center that has weekly “hang out” programs, called “The Spiritual Spot.” The regionally based Muslim Association of Arizona helps Muslim young people get involved in community services projects such as graffiti cleanup, distributing food at shelters, blood drives, and toy drives. The Islamic Association of Saskatoon Regina Mosque includes an Orphan Sponsorship program aimed at helping young people (and their parents) support poor Muslim children in Palestine, Pakistan, Sudan, and Kosovo.

Dawa is a term that comes up frequently in the web content of Mosque based and Regionally based Muslim youth website. The Christian youth work equivalent of dawa is “outreach” or “evangelism.” A good example is
the Mosque Es Salam in Chandler, Arizona. They have recently completed their youth center (6500 sq ft) and have plans ultimately to append a much larger facility that will include indoor swimming pools, sports courts, and additional office and meeting space for counseling and classes. In Kingston-Upon Thames (Surrey) UK their club and sports programs have as an important goal the servicing of the entire community. Young people are welcome at their activities, without regard to religion. This “all are welcome” is mirrored by the Epson and Ewell Islamic Society (Surrey) UK in their very full calendar of youth activities, including (apparently) frequent trips to the paintballing facility.

Summary and Conclusions

In this paper we have sought to understand some of the key religious and cultural foundations upon which Muslim youth work rests. We have seen that Muslim youth work not only rests upon relevantly applicable texts in the Qur’an, but cultural understanding as to the age of accountability and particular Arabic words that frame the ethos (and obligations) of adolescence. Here, for the first time, we have a count of actual Muslim youth groups and their country or region specific ratios to the number of Mosques in the same area. It will be interesting in future research to go back to these same countries and regions to see if the ratio of youth group to Mosques has changed over time.

Given the fact that Muslim youth work exists, and is organization nationally, regionally, and at the Mosque level we can understand the operational components of Muslim youth work. In that process we have seen that while many UK Muslim youth ministries can be described as a deficit model in so far as the ministry address critical problems often attributed to being both British and Muslim, in North America the “feel” is more often an enrichment model. This distinction and its implications certainly deserve further study.

The study of Muslim youth work rests comfortably in at least three home-bases of social-science inquiry. 1) Sub-Culture Identity Theory provides vocabulary of what is actually happening as Muslims seek to facilitate youth work and youth groups for their own sons and daughters. These youth groups provide a place where their Muslimness can be affirmed, strengthened, and celebrated. 2) Similarly, Attachment Theory gives vocabulary to the roll of those paid and volunteer Muslim youth workers who are seeking to provided youth-relevant services. Attachment theory also helps conceptualize what happens in Muslim youth groups, youth camps, and youth conferences when it comes to peer-bonding, which is especially important for young people whose neighborhood and/or school is
not majority Muslim. 3) Lastly, Youth Religiosity Research is interested in how young Muslims experience and live out their faith, how youth work contributes to this religiosity, and the live-outcomes of this faith. This Muslim youth religiosity research is germane for its own sake, but also in juxtaposition with young people of other faiths or no faith at all.

If Muslim youth work grows in both the actual number of youth groups and grows as a percentage of Mosques with youth programs, the reality of Muslim youth groups will become increasingly visible. As we have seen, in some communities where Muslim youth work is visible, robust, and meeting the needs of youth and their parents, that future has already arrived.

The session will conclude with an informal presentation and discussion focused on two important questions:

1) In what respect is the rise of a robust Islamic youth work presence actually a good thing for the Christian faith, family, and youth group?

2) How can we help our own young people have a more articulated faith when it comes to Christology?

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Endnotes


3 Steve Bell and Colin Chapman eds, Between Naivety and Hostility, Uncovering the Best Christian Responses of Islam in Britain, (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media Limited.

5 Emerson, Gallagher, Kennedy, Sikkink, and Smith, 118-119. See also a more general analysis of youth culture by M. Brake, Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain, and Canada (New York: Routledge, 1990).
12 For a good example of this research in the US, see Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, Soul Searching, The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). This is the first of several book-length publications stemming from the National Study of Youth and Religion.
15 My thanks to Nyack College students Anna Bailey and Tom Belo for their tireless and exacting work in creating Excel files with key information on these mosques. While the information currency or correctness of each mosque listed was not verified in this research, the comprehensive nature of salatomatic.com provides at least a starting point when it comes to key information.
24 Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, The Theological turn in Youth Ministry (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2011) and Tony Jones, The Church is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement (Minneapolis, JoPa Group, 2011) as well as Pete Ward, Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012)
28 For example, see an early work by Muhammad Anwar, “Religious Identity in Plural Societies: The Case of Britain,” Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs 2 no.2 (1980). 110-121.
29 Tahir Alam, Enhancing Youth Work Practice Through the Concepts of Islamic Morality and Education” in Belton and Hamid, op.cit. 30.
30 Belton and Hamid. op.cit. 102-103.
31 It will be helpful to readers outside the UK to understand there is a vast “community youth work” infrastructure in the UK. Universities offer degrees in “youth and community youth work” and, until the budget cuts of 2010-2011, virtually every village, town, and city had at least one paid full time youth
worker who maintained community based programs and events to service the needs of especially minority or economically disadvantaged youth.


35 For a more complete list representative of the 90’s see S. Gilliant, “A Descriptive Account of Islamic Youth Organisations in the UK,” The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (Fall, 1996)


37 Belton and Hamid, op.cit. 18.

